CENTRAL AVENUE SOUNDS:

Coney Woodman

Interviewed by Steven L. Isoardi

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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None.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: Jackson, Mississippi, June 7, 1917.

Education: Jordan High School.

Military Service: United States Army, 1942-46.

Spouse: Emily Riley Woodman, married 1946, seven children.

CAREER HISTORY:

Played piano with the following:

Woodman Brothers Biggest Little Band in the World, 1934-39.

Les Hite, 1941-42.

Connie Jordan and the Jordanaires, 1947.

Jackson Trio, 1953.

Duke Jones, 1950s.

Maintenance, Rockwell International, 1964-82.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Steven L. Isoardi, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program; B.A., M.A., Government, University of San Francisco; M.A., Ph.D., Political Science, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Woodman's home, Los Angeles.

Dates, length of sessions: July 11, 1993 (112 minutes).

Total number of recorded hours: 2.0

Persons present during interview: Woodman and Isoardi.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series designed to preserve the spoken memories of individuals, primarily musicians, who were raised near and/or performed on Los Angeles's Central Avenue, especially from the late 1920s to the mid-1950s. Musician and teacher William Green, his student Steven Isoardi, and early project interviewer Buddy Collette provided major inspiration for the UCLA Oral History Program's inaugurating the Central Avenue Sounds Oral History Project.

In preparing for the interview, Isoardi consulted jazz histories, autobiographies, oral histories, relevant jazz periodicals, documentary films, and back issues of the California Eagle and the Los Angeles Sentinel.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Woodman's childhood and education in Watts and continuing on through his career as a jazz musician. Major topics covered include early experiences playing music with his brothers under his father's direction, contact with other musicians who played on Central Avenue, and playing in clubs throughout Southern California.

EDITING:

Alex Cline, editor, edited the interview. He checked

the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Whenever possible, the proper names of the nightclubs were checked against articles and advertisements in back issues of the California Eagle. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Woodman reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Susan E. Douglass, editor, prepared the table of contents. Rebecca Stone, oral history assistant, assembled the biographical summary and interview history. Kathleen McAlister, editorial assistant, compiled the index.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 11, 1993

ISOARDI: Okay, Coney, let's start at the very beginning: where you were born and what it was like, your family--

WOODMAN: To be in the world? [laughter]

ISOARDI: As far as you can remember.

WOODMAN: Well, you want me to tell you when I was born? [laughter] June 7, 1917, in Jackson, Mississippi.

ISOARDI: So you weren't born in L.A.

WOODMAN: No, I came here when I was a baby. I was about nine months, they say.

ISOARDI: So you don't remember Jackson?

WOODMAN: No, I just take their word for it. [laughter] From that point on, we were raised in Watts.

ISOARDI: So you moved to Watts when you first came here?

WOODMAN: Yeah, well, first we lived in Los Angeles on Fourteenth Street.

ISOARDI: Do you remember any of that?

WOODMAN: No. I went to that elementary school-- Lafayette [Elementary School], I think, is the elementary school up there. I stayed there. Then we finally moved to Watts. We bought some property in Watts. My grandma [Henrietta Jones]-- My grandma and all of us came here from Mississippi.

ISOARDI: Oh, she joined you, then?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, she--

ISOARDI: How old were you when you moved down here?

WOODMAN: I was nine months. Oh, you mean in Watts.

ISOARDI: When you came to Watts.

WOODMAN: Oh, I guess it would be going into the first grade. I was about six, I guess.

ISOARDI: Do you remember L.A. at all when you were up there for the first six years?

WOODMAN: A little bit, yeah. I remember some of it. We used to go by that ice cream place, Star Ice Cream Factory.

ISOARDI: A big hangout for you, eh?

WOODMAN: Yeah. My grandfather put a hamburger joint right near it. He was a cook, and he knew how to make those good hamburgers, old-time hamburgers.

ISOARDI: So he set up his own place?

WOODMAN: Yeah. See, they had a restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi, before they moved here.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. My grandma always had been kind of business-like. Then we moved to Watts, and we bought that property right on Grape Street and Wilmington [Avenue]--Well, 111th [Street] and Wilmington in Watts. It's Grape Street [Elementary] School now. We had that property there next to the school.

ISOARDI: You didn't have a long walk to school, did you?

WOODMAN: No, it's right in my yard. They finally bought it from us. They bought the whole thing. So we moved from there in '42. My parents moved onto Forty-ninth [Street] and Broadway. Well, Forty-ninth Street between Main [Street] and Broadway. Well, I was in the service when they bought that place, because we were in the service till-- Let's see. 'Forty-two to about '46.

ISOARDI: Oh, you were in quite a few years.

WOODMAN: For four years.

ISOARDI: So you came back, and they were back up--

WOODMAN: They were there when I came out, and I stayed there. I stayed there. And then I met my wife [Emily Riley Woodman], future wife, down in Louisiana where I was stationed. I sent for her in '46. My parents [William B. Woodman Sr. and Irene Woodman] suggested that I should settle down and get married, because I was wild. [laughter]

ISOARDI: All right. We're going to have to hear about your wild days. When your grandparents set up their restaurant, where was it at? Do you remember? Their hamburger place.

WOODMAN: Well, it was on Fourteenth Street somewhere around up there in--

ISOARDI: Near Central [Avenue] and Fourteenth?

WOODMAN: Yeah, well, it was right off of Central, up there by that Coca-Cola [Bottling Company] place, right in that area.

ISOARDI: So you came out here with your parents and your grandparents?

WOODMAN: They all came out here together.

ISOARDI: Was this your mom's parents or your dad's?

WOODMAN: Well, that was my dad's mother. Her folks, they still lived back in Mississippi. They didn't want to leave. They stayed there till real late. Finally, in '40, the war [World War II] was just about over and everything, then they came out here from Mississippi. My dad was born in Canton, Mississippi, my mother was from Terry, Mississippi, and so they all-- Her folks came out here later, on my mother's side.

ISOARDI: When your dad was growing up, was he playing music then?

WOODMAN: No. You know, my dad went to a Catholic school, graduated, and he played mostly for the church. I don't know who he played for mostly down there. But after he got to Los Angeles he got a job working at the Follies [Burlesque] Theatre. He played there twenty-some years.

ISOARDI: So he was a professional musician in L.A.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. My dad could have gone and played with all the musicians; he was that good.

ISOARDI: Do you know how he got started in music? Was he very young when he started studying music?

WOODMAN: Yeah, he had to be, because he was twenty years old when I was born, and he was blowing then.

ISOARDI: He was good then. [laughter]

WOODMAN: Well, he just practiced, played around the church and everything, things like that.

ISOARDI: Do you know how far music goes back in your family? Was your grandfather a musician?

WOODMAN: All I can remember is my dad. I don't know about anything else. But on my mother's side, everybody could sing. We were musically inclined. It was mostly related to the church. All of my folks were active in the church. The founder of our denomination was Bishop C. P. Jones. It was Church of Christ Holiness. And Bishop Mason, he started a sanctified church and they split because one said he could go farther than the other. Bishop Mason went farther. He said Church of Christ in God. I guess you've heard it that way. Bishop Jones said Church of Christ Holiness. So that's the way those two denominations kind of split up a little bit.

ISOARDI: This was in Mississippi when it split?

WOODMAN: Yeah, I guess so. Somewhere down that way, because Bishop Mason, when he came out-- They split quite a while ago, because they were all Baptists at first, and

then they went that way, like I'm trying to explain now. In other words, they separated quite a bit in that denomination. So that's where it all went. We've got churches all over with our denomination.

ISOARDI: What's it called?

WOODMAN: Church of Christ Holiness. See, then they finally divided here after Bishop C.P. Jones died. Someone else took it over, Bishop Connick. Bishop Connick took it over, but it should have been Bishop Washington. He's the one that married my wife, Emily, and I together. He was the vice president of our denomination. So what they did, to keep it that way, we had to put "U.S.A." Church of Christ Holiness, U.S.A., United States of America. But he just kept it the same way, Church of Christ, period. So we're still divided; we never went back. But we do unite together that way.

ISOARDI: So music is in your family. And I guess your first memories may be music or in church, then.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. But I didn't get to play too much, because we were so young. We played in the world. We came the other way.

ISOARDI: Did you want to play music when you were a little kid?

WOODMAN: Well, I didn't know any better. I guess it was just my daddy being a musician. He taught us. He started

us all off playing music.

ISOARDI: How old were you?

WOODMAN: Oh, I guess I was about seven.

ISOARDI: That's when you first started studying music?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I had a German teacher.

ISOARDI: So he didn't teach you right away?

WOODMAN: Well, he taught all of us to a certain point. Maybe the scales or--

ISOARDI: Just to get you going. A little technique?

WOODMAN: He got us concerned. He got us interested, let's put it that way. Then everybody finally got teachers. You know who taught my brother [William B. Woodman Jr.] playing saxophone. Marshal Royal's uncle taught my brother the clarinet. You know Marshal Royal, I guess?

ISOARDI: Oh, his uncle? Is it Ernest Royal?

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. He taught my brother. And Britt [Woodman] mostly took lessons from my father.

ISOARDI: Did your father play the trombone?

WOODMAN: Yeah, that was his instrument.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. He was great, man. My dad had the opportunity to go with anybody when he was playing. He could have gone with Duke [Ellington] or anybody. But he didn't want to leave us, because he had three sons. There were only just four of us altogether, but just three of us

were very active in music. The other baby boy [George L. Woodman], he had his other ideas. But anyway, that's the way it went, and we all went one way or another.

I took lessons from Professor Grey. I think my brother--

ISOARDI: What was his name? Grey?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

ISOARDI: And he was the German guy you were first--?

WOODMAN: No. He taught mostly-- Guys would go get counterpoint from him. It was on Jefferson [Boulevard], I think. He taught all those musicians counterpoint.

ISOARDI: Kind of theory.

WOODMAN: Yeah, theory things. Like they'd come in town, they'd want to learn something else about music, they'd go to him. But he taught me piano. I took lessons from him for technique and everything. He brought me out to where I was. Then I left from there and did my thing, you know.

ISOARDI: How old were you when you started studying with him?

WOODMAN: Oh, I had just graduated from Jordan High School.

ISOARDI: Okay, so you were about eighteen when you started studying.

WOODMAN: Or nineteen.

ISOARDI: Now, before then, you begin by studying with

your father. Your father, I guess, started showing you--

WOODMAN: Well, I had this German teacher who came around in a buggy.

ISOARDI: [laughter] Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Just one horse pulling the buggy, man. And he would sit out there and wait until she'd get through teaching us her lesson.

ISOARDI: Oh, it was a woman?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: A German lady. So she was your first teacher after your father.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, Dad, he inspired us. He knew enough about everything, music, you know. But he didn't have time to fool with us boys. He'd get after us if we didn't practice. That was his job. [laughter]

ISOARDI: So this is a lady who traveled around in her buggy and visited people's homes and would teach their children how to play.

WOODMAN: Yeah. She was a good teacher.

ISOARDI: So you studied piano with her for a few years?

WOODMAN: Yeah. That's why I was in school.

ISOARDI: How much did you practice?

WOODMAN: Well, as much as I had to. [laughter] Because Mama would tell my dad if we didn't. [laughter] I wanted to play ball or something.

ISOARDI: So after school you had to come home and practice?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. All of us studied the piano first, though.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? Your dad started you all on the piano?

WOODMAN: All on piano. See, piano's a good foundation.

ISOARDI: You learn the whole structure, I guess.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: But were you attracted to piano? Because you stayed with piano, didn't you?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Somebody had to. [laughter] Those other guys had all those other instruments. [laughter] I studied banjo, and finally I went to the guitar, but I didn't stay on that too long. My dad was working at the Follies. Did he [William B. Woodman Jr.] tell you about that?

ISOARDI: I can't remember. Why don't you tell me about it? When did he start at the Follies?

WOODMAN: My dad was playing when we were small. My daddy played at the Follies for twenty-some years.

ISOARDI: Really? Every night?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Three shows a day. He'd come home to eat dinner. He had to be at the first show around noon. We'd eat at noon all together, come home from school and eat,

and then he would leave. We wouldn't see him till the next day. Because he had to come all the way-- It was between Third [Street] and Fourth [Street] on Main Street.

ISOARDI: That's where the Follies--?

WOODMAN: The Follies Theatre was.

ISOARDI: That's a long commute all the way to Watts, then.

WOODMAN: Yeah. And they had bad transportation. Yeah, he did that for many years, boy.

ISOARDI: How did he get back and forth? I guess they had the--

WOODMAN: Well, they had the red car. You've heard of the red car?

ISOARDI: Sure.

WOODMAN: Right over here it stopped, you know. Well, back this way.

ISOARDI: So that was the main way he made his living, then, was working the Follies?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: How many days a week did he work there?

WOODMAN: Every day.

ISOARDI: No kidding. Was the pay good?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. Up at the booming time in '28, he made as much as $100 when everybody's making money. Things were jumping till it fell, and then he started

getting $26 at the Depression, and he stayed there up till '40-something, you know. Well, that was a lot of money, $26 or something.

ISOARDI: That's pretty good money with that salary.

WOODMAN: Well, he did that for a while. Then that did go up. The union [American Federation of Musicians]-- They got $40. I don't know whether it was $48 or something. You know, it went up. Whatever the union said. I never worked the Follies. All of my brothers did. Britt played the Follies Theatre. My brother played there for a while. A lot of these-- I think Buddy Collette-- Did they never mention that? Do you remember? Playing the Follies Theatre?

ISOARDI: I can't remember. But I remember Buddy talking about a place I think called Million Dollar [Theatre].

WOODMAN: Yeah, that was a theater.

ISOARDI: Maybe that was it, then.

WOODMAN: Well, they probably used that for different reasons, you know, when they needed musicians. I don't know how that came about. I never played [there]. Because the piano player was always the one who played for the singers and was the arranger and the leader. So they had someone always for that purpose. I don't know if I was capable of doing it. They were just older and everything. And those guys stayed; they kept the job.

But they would change otherwise, having somebody like trombone players, saxophone. They'd come and go, you know. But the piano player, he was very important. He had to run over the singers and learn-- In other words, he was like the director almost, in charge.

ISOARDI: Yeah, conducting everything.

WOODMAN: Yeah. But they did have a director-- It was so popular at one time-- I sure wish I could show you; I had pictures. They would have a director of the band, because they would present him on the stage, you know. It was big-time at one time. Follies was big-time. The Follies Theatre. It's a wonder you've never heard of it before. Burlesque, you know. And Mickey Rooney's father [Joe Rooney] was a top comedian there.

ISOARDI: No kidding.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: So did Mickey Rooney, I guess, get his start--? [laughter]

WOODMAN: Well, his father, he gave him a good education and everything. I don't know how many kids were in Mickey Rooney's [family]. All I know is about Mickey Rooney.

ISOARDI: That's interesting. His father was at the Follies.

WOODMAN: Yeah. He was good. He was short, too. [laughter]

ISOARDI: What was Watts like back then when you were a kid? You were living on, you said, was it Grape?

WOODMAN: Well, we were between Grape and Wilmington Avenue. It was close to Wilmington.

ISOARDI: What was it like?

WOODMAN: Well, it was dirt streets, man.

ISOARDI: Really. No cement anywhere?

WOODMAN: No. It was muddy and everything else when it rained. We saw it just grow. And the main street was 103rd [Street]. And during the [Watts] riot in '65, that's when they burnt Watts down. They burnt most of 103rd down.

ISOARDI: So the community around there, 103rd, what was on 103rd?

WOODMAN: Oh, stores, everything, all your stores. Little shopping stores. They had Smith Market down near where you'd catch the Watts local--or the Long Beach-- They called the Long Beach the fast train. It wouldn't stop at everyplace. But it did stop at 103rd. It had certain stops it would make. But you had to catch the local, and it would stop at Vernon [Avenue] and this and that.

ISOARDI: You could hop on an express and get out to Long Beach pretty fast?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. It moved, yeah.

ISOARDI: It sounds like you had better transportation than we do now. [laughter]

WOODMAN: Yeah, well, you know why they did that. They wanted to sell cars, so they cut it out. That was the biggest mistake-- And now they've got this--

ISOARDI: That was a crime. That was a crime when they did that.

WOODMAN: Yeah. That is the main route now, Amtrak and everything. The Blue Line, they call it.

ISOARDI: That's right. The new one they put in just a year ago [Metrolink].

WOODMAN: Yeah. It's on the same line. They could have had that--

ISOARDI: They could have kept it up.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Then they wouldn't have so much smog.

ISOARDI: The auto manufacturers really did a criminal thing.

WOODMAN: They won a lot of the politicians, you know. Took up the tracks in certain places.

ISOARDI: Sad. Jeez. So it was pretty rural. It was like being out in the country, then, out in Watts.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was the country. There wasn't anything out here hardly. This was all trees out here like a jungle where I live. You didn't come down here. This was called Lover's Lane or something.

ISOARDI: I guess if you're here-- Here we're down near-- what?--El Segundo [Boulevard] and Avalon [Boulevard].

You're about twenty blocks south of where you were.

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. That's quite a ways.

ISOARDI: So this was nothing then.

WOODMAN: Nothing, that's right. This was a new tract I bought out here. It was the last house that was sold out here. They had two, next door, and I was fortunate to get this one. I had one kid born-- My wife was pregnant, and she was raised right in this house, my oldest daughter [Constance B. Woodman]. So all my children were raised right here in this house.

ISOARDI: So by the time you're in grammar school down at-- Was it, Grape Elementary?

WOODMAN: Yeah, elementary.

ISOARDI: You're playing music all the time. All your spare time, your dad's got you practicing.

WOODMAN: Well, we were practicing then; we weren't doing too much playing when we were going there. We didn't start really playing till we got up to junior high school. Yeah. And then that property that we had, we bought the rest of that before the school got everything. I guess he told you where we used to play for the-- Have a dance. We called it the Woodman Brothers Studio, and we'd give dances there.

ISOARDI: Where was that?

WOODMAN: That was at 111th and Wilmington.

ISOARDI: This was like a little club or a-- This wasn't where you lived.

WOODMAN: Well, we lived about a few doors-- No, it was part of our home land, you know.

ISOARDI: So you had all this property?

WOODMAN: Yeah, we had all that property. And we had a service station on 112th [Street] and Wilmington, my grandma did.

ISOARDI: Your grandma was sure a businesswoman.

WOODMAN: Grandma was in business. She's the one that had the brains, boy. We'd have been rich if my father would have listened to her. I hate to say that, but that's the truth. She had a business head. She was smart, boy.

ISOARDI: Gee, that's a good chunk of land, then. She had a gas station at 112th?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And you had your house?

WOODMAN: On 111th.

ISOARDI: And you had another building where you had a studio?

WOODMAN: Well, it was right on the corner. See, some Jews had a store, and we bought them out eventually. They sold out. They wanted to leave because there were too many people coming around here. [laughter] You know, they moved somewhere to make some more money. They got

away from there.

ISOARDI: So you guys took over the--

WOODMAN: The store. There was a residence in the back of it--you know how people lived then--and we made a studio out of it. We'd teach piano lessons. My brother [William B. Woodman Jr.] started-- That's where Buddy Collette-- We taught all those guys. He started them off, you know.

ISOARDI: Really? You guys were teaching then, also?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I had students.

ISOARDI: No kidding.

WOODMAN: I was a kid almost. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Yeah, I was going to ask you, how old were you then? Were you in high school then?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Jeez.

WOODMAN: Well, I had a good foundation. You only had to teach them the scales. You didn't have to know too much. I didn't teach any theory. I learned that when I went to Professor Grey. Harmony and all that, we all learned that later. But all we did was know our instruments, you know.

ISOARDI: Who were some of your friends down here?

WOODMAN: What, in Watts?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

WOODMAN: All these guys. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Who? Well, we've got to get the names.

WOODMAN: David Bryant.

ISOARDI: So David's in the area down here?

WOODMAN: Joe Comfort, "Big Jay" [Cecil] McNeely. Let's see who else here? Of course Buddy Collette. I can't remember these girls too well, but Esther Phillips.

ISOARDI: Esther Phillips the singer?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: She had some hit records, didn't she, in the fifties? Wasn't she known as Little Esther Phillips?

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. Little Esther, that's right. She went to Jordan High School. She was much older than me. No, when I say-- I'm trying to think. In 1935, I was playing too. [laughter] We go back. [laughter] At the age of thirteen she was known as Little Esther, yeah.

ISOARDI: So when you were in elementary school, you're studying, you're practicing a lot. Then you go into junior high school. Where do you go to junior high school?

WOODMAN: Jordan High School. That's just right here.

ISOARDI: Oh, it's a junior high school and high school combined?

WOODMAN: It started in seventh grade. They had it that way then.

ISOARDI: I see. So you go to Jordan from seventh grade all the way through twelfth?

WOODMAN: Yeah, after sixth grade. See, since grade school--that was called Grape Street School--I lived next door. They bought us out. The school bought all our property then. And we'd walk up to 103rd to Jordan High School, which wasn't too bad, because it was all vacant lots walking through there, so we could just take shortcuts and cut over through the wilderness, you know, to the high school. It didn't take long. Well, nothing took long when you were young. It's as if you don't want to walk a block, man, now. I'm glad I walked; it was good for me.

ISOARDI: True. So how's your music going by the time you get to Jordan? Are you guys playing at all?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. We started playing for different functions, had club dates and everything.

ISOARDI: How does that happen? When does your father decide--? I guess it's your father who's getting this together, right?

WOODMAN: Yeah, he wanted us to make that money. Out of a bit, too, he'd give us a quarter. [laughter] A quarter for the piano you're in [inaudible]. We got a quarter about every day almost. That was a lot of money, though.

ISOARDI: Yeah, you guys must have been--

WOODMAN: We were rich.

ISOARDI: Richer than all your other friends. [laughter]

WOODMAN: Yeah, well, at that time we made about $2 a night.

ISOARDI: Each?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Sure.

ISOARDI: Two dollars you had a night?

WOODMAN: Yeah, when we played.

ISOARDI: You were rich.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, we didn't work every night, now. [laughter] But when we did, that was good, though.

ISOARDI: So how old are you when you start playing in front of people?

WOODMAN: I was the oldest, so I guess about fifteen or sixteen or something. Because, let's see, Britt's three years younger than all of us. We've got to start from the bottom. I don't think he was playing when he was six. [laughter] I don't know.

ISOARDI: So you're in your teens when you start playing?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. Early teens, yeah.

ISOARDI: And initially it's you and it's William and it's Britt? And who else?

WOODMAN: Oh, you want to know the rest--

ISOARDI: Who else plays with you?

WOODMAN: Oh, we had several guys later on. Joe Comfort played with us, and he had a brother named Frank Comfort. He played the trumpet.

ISOARDI: And he played with you, also?

WOODMAN: Well, he would sit in sometimes. He was learning. He never did play too much. But Joe Comfort played trumpet, also. Joe Comfort was a pretty good trumpet player. You know Joe Comfort.

ISOARDI: I know who he is, but--

WOODMAN: He played with [Nat] King Cole. And Jessie Sailes played the drums.

ISOARDI: You had a damn good group.

WOODMAN: Jessie Sailes, he played at the Follies. All these guys played down there. Jewell Grant played with us. Maxwell Davis-- I guess you've heard of him, haven't you? Maxwell Davis, a great saxophone player.

ISOARDI: And he played with you guys?

WOODMAN: Yeah. All those guys played with us-- I mean, at different occasions, you know. They didn't regularly, because the regular musicians were mostly just five or six of us: Jessie Sailes, Joe Comfort, the bass, and we had another sax. Jewell Grant came from Texas. He was accomplished. He was a great musician. All those guys could play. What do you call him, that guitar player--I forget his name--who played with King Cole? He played with us on some occasions. And Maxwell Davis, of course.

ISOARDI: Now, were most of these people living down there around you?

WOODMAN: No, they lived in town somewhere. Nobody lived in Watts but us. [laughter] But these guys did, Bryant and-- They went to Jordan High School. Most of the other guys went to Jefferson High School.

ISOARDI: When you first started playing, did you have a name?

WOODMAN: Yeah, the Woodman Brothers Biggest Little Band in the World.

ISOARDI: The Woodman Brothers Biggest Little Band in the World. Did your dad ever play with you guys? Or was he just sort of managing things?

WOODMAN: Just managing. He'd write arrangements for us.

ISOARDI: So you guys had a book, then, also, that you played from.

WOODMAN: Yeah. And there was another guy named Davis at the union, very active. And Maxwell did a lot of writing for us. Maxwell was a good arranger. You should have heard him play tenor, man. He was great. I tell you what. On occasion, all those musicians have played with us. Like Red Mack. For different occasions we'd add more to the band.

ISOARDI: Depending on what your needs were, I guess.

WOODMAN: Yeah. But mostly it was just us brothers. We had a couple more pieces. See, all the brothers played three instruments. My brothers played saxophone, trumpet,

everybody. I played the banjo and things like that.

ISOARDI: You played the banjo publicly, also?

WOODMAN: Yeah, at the Follies. My dad got us up there. We played on the stage.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

WOODMAN: Yeah. We played at the Follies.

ISOARDI: How old were you?

WOODMAN: About sixteen or seventeen, something like that. That's what made the novelty, with all the instruments we played, my brothers, which I couldn't do. When I played the Follies, I played the banjo, because we did a song called--boy, we sure got mad about that later--we did a song-- Britt didn't tell you about it? We did "Old Black Joe."

ISOARDI: I don't think Britt told me that you guys played at the Follies.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: What was it called? The song?

WOODMAN: "Old Black Joe." [laughter] Foster, Stephen Foster. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Oh, jeez. [laughter] Why did your dad give you that?

WOODMAN: I don't know. Shit.

ISOARDI: [laughter] Oh, God! Did you guys have any choice over the music? Or did your dad tell you what to

play?

WOODMAN: Mostly. He'd write it. [laughter] We had to play what he'd write.

ISOARDI: You couldn't send it back, I guess. [laughter]

WOODMAN: The only thing we'd get is if we didn't play it right. [laughter]

ISOARDI: What kind of music were you playing? How would you describe the kind of music it was?

WOODMAN: Well, we played everything popular, mostly. Anything, you know. And we had stocks. We'd play a lot of stock music.

ISOARDI: So your dad would do stock arrangements sometimes for you guys?

WOODMAN: Well, we rearranged that, and then we'd play it like it is: cut out, break it down, you know, play it all like it was. We played all of Tommy Dorsey's music that was popular, anybody's music, you know. We played anything.

ISOARDI: You guys could read pretty good then I guess?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, we were known for the reading. That's what made us so great. We'd read anything. And when I would go play out for the studio or wherever, play for different things-- I played with so many things out in Hollywood. They'd put the music up there, and they were amazed because I could re-transpose. Then they'd go limp,

you know. We were pretty gifted. I did it better [then] than I can do it now. [laughter] I'm not doing it. [laughter] Especially after those eighteen years. See, I worked at Rockwell [International], I started in '64 till '82. I didn't play any music. Church. I always went to church when I had time, and they'd want me to play different things, a solo or something. I'd go and learn right quick and play it for the church. But I couldn't play for the clubs, the nightclubs; I'd be working. I worked at night. The whole time I was at Rockwell, man, I couldn't get on a day [shift]. You've got to be there a hundred years before you get the day shift.

ISOARDI: So you were eighteen years at Rockwell on the night shift?

WOODMAN: No. Well, I started on the graveyard, man. And then after five years, then finally I got the swing shift. Well, they cut it out. Since I couldn't play, I'd rather work graveyard, because you get paid for eight [hours] and don't work but seven and a half [hours], or seven or something. But anyway, I liked that. Go to work at twelve and be home by seven. You have the whole day. Then finally we put everybody on swing shift. Swing shift was to one thirty or one o'clock or something like that.

ISOARDI: Did they eliminate the graveyard shift?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, finally. After they got the Sputnik

up. I think Russia had Sputnik. I don't know who has that. But anyway, [John F.] Kennedy said he was going to put one up in '69. We built what flies around NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]. We worked for NASA, the company did. I worked in the clean room. No dust. You can't have any dust because it's dangerous there with contamination. So I had to wear a body suit, you know, all covered up. I did all that.

ISOARDI: So you started working at Rockwell in the sixties, right?

WOODMAN: 'Sixty-four.

ISOARDI: Up until you retired.

WOODMAN: I retired in '82.

ISOARDI: So you didn't play much music, then, except church.

WOODMAN: That's all, and that was just whenever they needed me. I didn't play any church songs or anything. That's what I've got up there now on the piano. I don't know them all now, but I just played what I saw in the book. They liked the way I played because I just looked at the melody and played what I wanted. [laughter] I didn't jazz it up but-- I played classical, you know. I could do that. Now they hear me play, they like the way I do it, because I change it around. [laughter] I'm not jazzing it; I just put-- Inspiration, you know. I can't

help that.

ISOARDI: It sounds like you guys get pretty popular pretty fast, then. Once you start playing in public down in Watts, in no time at all you're playing outside of Watts. You're playing--

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, all around Los Angeles and everywhere. My brother Britt told me he was trying to think of that-- We went to Tucson, Arizona. Did he tell you about how we played down there and they wanted to put us all in the service?

ISOARDI: You're kidding.

WOODMAN: They wanted volunteers. They wanted to induct us. Sometimes I think about it. Because, see, that was in '35 or '40. About five years later-- The war started in '39. A lot of guys volunteered to get in the service around '39. But they started drafting about '40, '41. That's when we--

ISOARDI: Well, '41, the United States goes into the war.

WOODMAN: Goes into the war. That's right. Well, you got drafted. But, see, that way we would have been volunteer if we had gone in then. I mean, they asked us if we wanted to sign up. I did say that wrong. We weren't drafted then.

ISOARDI: So you guys took off for Tucson?

WOODMAN: Yeah. We played the Beehive down there. Britt

was trying to think of that when I went to talking about it, what he told you. I don't know if he told you about that, but he couldn't think of the place we played. And then the guy who was booking us down there took the money, ran off with the money, and we had nowhere to stay.

ISOARDI: You guys played the gig, and then you didn't have any money?

WOODMAN: No money to get back and everything. This lady had charge of this house with these white folks. She had charge of the house. So we stayed in this big mansion down there and had breakfast, and the whole thing. She liked me. [laughter] She was older than me, but it was all right. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, really?

WOODMAN: And she saw that we had money and got back.

ISOARDI: Boy, you were a man of many talents that really came in handy.

WOODMAN: Well, I've always been fortunate that way. That's why I had to leave town. [laughter]

ISOARDI: When did you have to leave town? Was that around then?

WOODMAN: No. Let's see. I was around twenty years old, nineteen, twenty years old.

ISOARDI: So that was about the late thirties, 1937, '38?

WOODMAN: Oh, no. Let's see. How old was I? Yeah, '38.

It was '37 or '38 or something like that. Yeah. Because I was in Chicago in '38. It was '38.

ISOARDI: You took off for Chicago?

WOODMAN: I had to kiss the wagon, man. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Do you want to tell us why?

WOODMAN: You know why. I told you. [laughter]

ISOARDI: It's a question of whether you want to put it down, Coney. [laughter]

WOODMAN: Shit. [laughter] The other girl laid it on me, let's put it that way. I was going to marry her. She changed her mind. See, somebody talked her out of it, her auntie or something.

ISOARDI: Talked her out of it? Out of marrying you?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Down there. She wanted to have a wedding in Los Angeles somewhere, under those circumstances. Not that I thought I was too good, but I didn't want to marry like that, you know. Shotgun wedding: that's what you called them.

ISOARDI: So you took off for Chicago?

WOODMAN: Yeah. After that I caught the train, man, and left.

ISOARDI: Why Chicago? Did you have friends or family out there?

WOODMAN: I had an auntie there, yeah, my auntie. I stayed there. I worked there playing the piano down in

the dugouts. See, one of those gangsters had gotten killed; I forget what his name was. But it was a gangsters' place. I made $2 a night and tips. I got plenty of dimes, boy. That was a lot of money, if they'd give you a dime, you know.

ISOARDI: I guess Chicago must have been full of clubs then.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. Most of them down in the basement, too. It was on Michigan [Avenue], that main street downtown in the Loop almost. I played there for quite a while. And then-- Let's see. I boxed while I was there. I got my papers and everything. I fought where Joe Louis was trained.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I fought lightweight. I was called the California Kid.

ISOARDI: No kidding? When did you start doing that?

WOODMAN: Well, you made $3 when you fought amateur fights, and they had a club there on South Park [Avenue].

ISOARDI: This was in Chicago?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: But before that time you hadn't done any fighting?

WOODMAN: Well, I used to fool around.

ISOARDI: But nothing serious.

WOODMAN: Nothing serious. I needed the $3, man.

ISOARDI: What about your hands? You didn't worry about your hands?

WOODMAN: Hell no. I worried about going down, man! [laughter] I never thought about that. I always used my hands.

ISOARDI: But a piano player, you know, one bad punch and--

WOODMAN: Yeah. I never gave that a thought too much.

ISOARDI: No kidding. Were you good?

WOODMAN: Well, I finally got whooped. You know who I fought? Sugar Ray [Robinson].

ISOARDI: You did?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I didn't know-- He wasn't popular then.

ISOARDI: He was just a kid.

WOODMAN: Yeah. But he had more fights than me. And, boy, he hit me in my stomach and it sure did hurt, boy. And after that, I quit.

ISOARDI: What level was that? You said lightweight?

WOODMAN: Yeah, lightweight.

ISOARDI: So you fought Sugar Ray as a lightweight?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, he was an amateur, too. Shit. He was just starting off himself. [laughter] He was more talented than me.

ISOARDI: Yeah. He was one hell of a talented boxer.

WOODMAN: He had the talent.

ISOARDI: Yeah, really. So you don't think you could have beat him again if you fought him again?

WOODMAN: No. No, I don't think I have that much talent. [laughter] Somebody would have said, "Man, keep [inaudible] Zale. What was his name?

ISOARDI: Tony Zale?

WOODMAN: Tony Zale. I ran with him a lot. And he helped me a whole lot. We were courting the same girl in Chicago.

ISOARDI: You and Tony Zale were? Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: He was a middleweight, wasn't he? Hell of a middleweight.

WOODMAN: Yeah, he was great. Well, he had-- All those guys had been fighting longer than me. I just came over there and was training. But I took the fights to go make that money. You didn't have to be all that good to fight amateurs. They'd need somebody, they'd give you $3 for three rounds. I guess that's $1 a round, when I figure it out. [laughter]

ISOARDI: If you last, I guess, eh? [laughter]

WOODMAN: I never got knocked out, though. I got hit a lot.

ISOARDI: What made you decide to go in and start boxing?

WOODMAN: I always liked it. I fought--

ISOARDI: Oh, you did like it earlier.

WOODMAN: We fought around here, my brothers and all of us. We'd go where there was boxing, and we'd have fights all the time with different people. You know, this was our territory, and when guys came from Los Angeles down here, we'd roll them back. [laughter] We were called the Twenty-second Street Gang. They had a swimming pool and everything up there. They had a park like up there. And they'd come down here and want to take over, you know, so we'd have to run them back. [laughter]

ISOARDI: What did you guys call yourselves? Did you have a name down here?

WOODMAN: Well, we finally had a club we called the Tarzans. That's a hell of a name, isn't it?

ISOARDI: [laughter] Yeah, I know. [laughter]

WOODMAN: I guess we were in the jungle. We were called the Tarzans.

ISOARDI: Who else was in that club? Anybody we know?

WOODMAN: No. No other musicians.

ISOARDI: No musicians. Just you guys.

WOODMAN: See, one thing, everybody liked us, and we socialized with everybody. Most musicians, they weren't in that category, fighting. Most musicians that we knew,

they weren't doing it. I don't know. Maybe we were older than them. I don't know what it was, but they didn't do it. Charles Mingus, he liked to try to fight all the time. He wanted to fight everybody, man. He challenged all of us. We'd just look at him and laugh, boy, because we knew we could whoop him, you know.

ISOARDI: [laughter] When did you meet him?

WOODMAN: Charles Mingus? He lived out here.

ISOARDI: So you met him in school?

WOODMAN: Yeah, he went to Jordan. Let's see. [looks through a yearbook] I think he's here. You can cut that off if you want to.

ISOARDI: You want to take a break?

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ISOARDI: Coney, you were saying about Mingus. You met him in school then, I guess. From the first time you met him, he was a fighter.

WOODMAN: Yeah, well, he always liked to fight, man. He would just come up that way. Mingus always had a reputation. When he got old, he followed his reputation. Any musician will tell you that. When he was a professional, he had problems with somebody. You know, like Cab Calloway or whoever he worked with, he had some problem.

ISOARDI: Yeah, even people in his own band. I mean, it was just always a--

WOODMAN: He had a temper like that, you know.

ISOARDI: So even when he was a kid you saw that.

WOODMAN: Yeah. He had that attitude. He couldn't help-- You know.

ISOARDI: What was his family like? I mean, does that--?

WOODMAN: Well, he had a sister. I don't know if it was two sisters. His sister, she liked me. I kind of liked her.

ISOARDI: Which sister is this?

WOODMAN: Oh, I forget her name. Grace [Mingus]. Grace.

I see her every year. She married some guy; he just passed, too. Last year we went up to this thing up at this park. I talked to him and saw her. She grew, boy. She's taller than me now, man. I'm sure glad I didn't marry her today. [laughter] Gray hair. I'm glad I got this out, talking about Charles Mingus's sister. [laughter] [tape recorder off] She was pretty then, boy. Had long hair. Her hair is short now and everything. Hey, that was thirty, forty years ago.

ISOARDI: So it was Charles and two sisters in that family?

WOODMAN: I think it was two. All I knew was Grace.

ISOARDI: Do you know much about his parents, what they were like? Did you ever meet them?

WOODMAN: Yeah. His father worked for the post office. Joe Comfort's father was a barber. He lived right over here on 114th Street. All these people--

ISOARDI: His family was on 114th?

WOODMAN: Yeah. That's where he lived out here in Watts. They called us Watts all during that time. I think it's finally called south Los Angeles now.

ISOARDI: And his father had a barbershop in Watts?

WOODMAN: Joe Comfort. In front of the house he had a kind of a-- It looked like a barn, boy, compared to now, just a shack like. But it was great then, you know.

Everything looked good. All the houses were shacks. You should have seen my house I was raised in. We added on to that as kids-- You know, more family. Nothing but just a little small place when we bought it.

ISOARDI: So the Comfort family had a barbershop in front, and the family lived in back?

WOODMAN: In back, yeah.

ISOARDI: And Mingus's father worked for the post office down here, delivering mail?

WOODMAN: I don't know. I think he was a clerk. Well, when I realize it, you really didn't pay much attention to what a father did during that time, because everybody just existed one way or the other, you know, doing their thing. As you get older, you find out what it was. That's the way it was.

ISOARDI: When you met Charles, was he playing music?

WOODMAN: He was learning. He was just carrying that-- what do you call it?--cello, walking by the house from school. He carried it up there and practiced with the band and everything. He'd walk by with it. I guess it got old; he got codgers that would laugh at him carrying that cello. [laughter] But he sure could play that, boy. That's how he learned to play so fast. You knew he was the greatest bass player. Charles Mingus was one of the best, boy. He could move, boy. That cello put him in

that position, because cello, you execute more than you would on a bass. But guys now, they do the same thing on a big old bass viol. They still move. At that time he'd go [sings thumping quarter notes], you know, one of those things.

ISOARDI: When did he switch from cello to bass? Do you remember?

WOODMAN: I really don't know. Britt could tell you. It's a wonder he didn't bring it up. Britt could tell you, because they were very close. Buddy Collette and Charles Mingus and all of them were pretty active in the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 767] before they amalgamated black and white for Local 47.

ISOARDI: Oh yeah, when 767 merged with 47.

WOODMAN: They used to raise cain about that and everything. They were very active in getting that started. Finally they did, you know. We were all in 767 on Central Avenue; that's where our union hall was. That was up there close to where I lived, where I was raised.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah. That was--what?--Seventeenth [Street] and Central?

WOODMAN: Something like that, yeah.

ISOARDI: Close to your first home, then.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Did Mingus ever play with your band, the Woodman

Brothers Band?

WOODMAN: I can't recall, no. See, Joe Comfort did most of the playing. We helped get him a fiddle and everything.

ISOARDI: Really? Joe Comfort? You helped get him his bass?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: He hadn't played bass before then?

WOODMAN: Well, I don't think so. Not too much. I don't know how that began, because that's when he started playing. But he had such a good ear, he would listen to records and everything, and he could play anything. He was just gifted. Joe Comfort was great, boy. And he could play trumpet good, too. He didn't take any lessons on that.

ISOARDI: Self-taught?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Amazing. Do you know how he got his music training?

WOODMAN: No. With us. [laughter] I guess he got more experience, I'll say that. You know, it's a funny thing. When you've got somebody carrying the lead and the drummer and all that, the guy with a bass, he can jive his way through to a certain point till he gets going. So he doesn't have to be the greatest. Nobody had to be too

good, because everybody could rely on someone, you know.

ISOARDI: So if you've got good time and a pretty good ear, you could get by?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Gee, and Joe Comfort not only played bass with you guys, he also pulled out the trumpet.

WOODMAN: Yeah, he played trumpet.

ISOARDI: Amazing. And everybody in your band played multiple instruments.

WOODMAN: Yeah. That's what made us so popular. That was the whole essence. That's what everybody said. And then we could read anything. We weren't faking. We were looking at music.

ISOARDI: So you really gave your audience, then, a different sound. Every number you'd have a different kind of sound.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Britt could play like Tommy Dorsey, play all those songs. We could play anybody's song. I'd play like Count Basie.

ISOARDI: Did you just kind of sight-read some things?

WOODMAN: Oh, well, we could. It didn't take us long--

ISOARDI: It didn't take you much practice to get something down?

WOODMAN: No. The best thing was where we would go from there. Because we'd break it down. We wouldn't play a

stock all the way through. Take some sections. Just play good parts, something like that.

ISOARDI: Did you guys do much improvising?

WOODMAN: Oh, well, truthfully--Britt gets mad about it now-- Daddy would write his solo out for him. Nobody would write mine out. [laughter] I don't think he wrote-- There's not too much you could write for me. I just--

ISOARDI: So you just faked it; you just improvised on it.

WOODMAN: I guess I did. See, mostly they just gave you the chords, and you play what's in there. You know the chords, you fake the rest. But that wasn't good, either. It should have been another way. I should have had a better ear, but I did it another way. I relied on something, where if I had had nothing, it would have still been better. Use my ear or something, that way. But I always had a guide or something which made it easier. I guess that's why you had it, it was no problem. Look at that one time and I've got it, you know. And I guess we had to do it that way--the quick way to get it over with. Sometimes we think it [would have been] better if we'd done it another way, though.

ISOARDI: You guys must have been awfully popular in high school. I mean, here you are, you've got this band, you're playing everywhere, you're making good money.

WOODMAN: They didn't know how much we made. We didn't tell them we got a quarter. [laughter] That's all we got. [laughter]

ISOARDI: What do you mean that's all--? I thought you said you got a couple of dollars.

WOODMAN: Yeah, but my dad didn't give us but a quarter. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Dad took all the money. [laughter]

WOODMAN: Yeah. But we were the only ones who had a '37 Packard, brand-new, on the street. Yellow. We had the newest car in Los Angeles, a '37 Packard. A Packard was a good car, boy, then. They don't make them anymore, I don't think.

ISOARDI: So your dad bought the car so you guys could get around?

WOODMAN: To travel around, yeah.

ISOARDI: To get to the gigs. You must have been sharp with that.

WOODMAN: Yeah, we were. That made us popular. Too popular. [laughter] It got me in trouble.

ISOARDI: That's right. [laughter]

WOODMAN: That girl lived down there at the [inaudible]. The father-- And boy, those guys are lawyers and everything at this bank on Broadway. I forget. Some bank. Anyway, he was president of that bank. He sent

them-- They all got good educations, and they didn't have to run out of town or anything. I get the blame for that. Because they lived next door to that girl. But they weren't popular, you know. They were just guys trying to get an education, going to school. They weren't in college or anything then. I wasn't either, but I was doing something. They figured I made a couple of dollars, so why not him. But I don't think-- Because, see, when I came back, I gave myself up, and she didn't come to court or anything. She didn't come back and press any charges.

ISOARDI: When did you come back?

WOODMAN: About a year later, in '39.

ISOARDI: You decided to come back and face the music?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: So you go to court and you turn yourself in?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And then she doesn't show up for whatever it was, the hearing or the trial?

WOODMAN: No, nothing. Didn't show up.

ISOARDI: Did you see her after that?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. [laughter]

ISOARDI: [laughter] What did you say?

WOODMAN: I don't even want to talk about it. It was something.

ISOARDI: Well, at least it turned out okay.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. I think we just looked at it as some past experience you know, quite a ways later. I was selling barber supplies when I saw her later.

ISOARDI: Oh, that was much later, then, because you're doing that in--what?--the early sixties?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Quite a ways later.

WOODMAN: I saw her then. She got in the truck that I was selling barber supplies in. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Just out of the blue?

WOODMAN: No. I talked to her. She just got in there, and we talked. We were friends after that.

ISOARDI: Well, that's good.

WOODMAN: We just made a mistake. But she had a gang of kids after that, though. Her son was pretty-- Had a funeral for him. Her kids are older than mine, because I didn't marry till I was twenty-nine.

ISOARDI: That was after you came back from the service.

WOODMAN: Yeah. But she got married, I don't know exactly when, but she had a good span on me as far as having children. That's what most of the guys did. All of them had kids older than mine. Well, I don't know how to explain it, but anyway, I had kids after them, but I was older, something like that.

ISOARDI: You mentioned that the family band-- You guys had

played up at the Follies, I guess, at a certain point. You're getting popular. I guess your dad's a pretty good manager, though. He's getting you gigs everywhere.

WOODMAN: Well, yeah. Well, yeah, I guess he was. People began to know about us. You know, like formals and all of the big things like that. We played at the Elks [hall] and the Masonic temple, you know, where the colored people had their big formals. We played for all those things.

ISOARDI: Really? What was the Elks like then?

WOODMAN: On Central? Well, that's where all the young kids came and had their formals, and they'd have dances and things like that.

ISOARDI: So like formal high school dances and things like that? Everybody would go to the Elks for those?

WOODMAN: The Elks, yeah. The Elks was very popular, right over on Twenty-something [Street] and Central.

ISOARDI: And what was that like? A big dance hall, I guess. A big ballroom?

WOODMAN: It was. A ballroom, yeah. It was something. Those were the days, boy.

ISOARDI: Where else did you play? You played on Central, you played the Follies, you played, I guess, local places in Watts. Did you go--?

WOODMAN: Well, they had a-- Oh, I forget this hall over there on B Street in Watts. We'd give dances up there,

you know, things like that.

ISOARDI: Give dances?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: You sponsored your own dances, as well?

WOODMAN: Yeah. T. C. Rucker, he had a printing shop and would make those big placards and put them on posts. We sponsored our own things.

ISOARDI: Where at? Where would you hold them at?

WOODMAN: Well, the Masonic, Elks, and different places.

ISOARDI: Oh, you'd rent the halls?

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah, had the whole thing. The money, we'd split it up.

ISOARDI: You probably did okay.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, my dad, he had charge of both of those things. I finally got my quarter for that. [laughter]

ISOARDI: He probably pulled in $100 for the night, and you got a quarter. [laughter]

WOODMAN: We laugh about that now. Britt used to get mad about that, though. He'd get to thinking about it. [laughter] I didn't care. It didn't make any difference.

ISOARDI: Where else did you play? You mentioned you went to Tucson at one point. So you're really getting outside of L.A.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Let's see. We played down in Long Beach.

We played down in Long Beach at the American Legion place, the colored American Legion down there. Anything like that. Mostly, at that time, they had their own little hall, you know. We'd play for all the functions. We played for everything just about. We stayed busy, man. We really stayed busy. Well, they had good music. We played everything, all kinds of music, you know.

ISOARDI: You guys were so versatile then, and you played all kinds of music for every occasion.

WOODMAN: Every occasion, yeah. We played any kind of music. For Mexicans, we played Mexican and everything.

ISOARDI: What about the white areas? Did you ever go up to Hollywood or West L.A. or anything like that?

WOODMAN: Yeah, we played out there. We played for movie stars. I can't recall the names of them. But we played all out there, at the canyon, at their houses, the big houses. We played for things like that. That's when the communists-- We played for all the communists. [laughter] A lot of movie stars were communists. They wanted us to join the Communist Party. We never got around to it. It's a good thing I didn't; I probably couldn't have worked at Rockwell. [laughter]

ISOARDI: They'd probably do a security check on you, the way things work.

WOODMAN: Oh, they did. I forgot. They asked did I ever

do anything for Russia or something, and you're supposed to say no if you didn't, and I left that blank. Boy, they picked me up and carried me to the office. I just forgot to sign. You know, I didn't play for any Russians. It was some question about Russia. At that time, they were having the cold war. Especially out there. When I was working for Rockwell, that was defense.

ISOARDI: Well, I guess during the thirties, though, the working people and the union people in this country and the socialist people were growing, were much larger, and so you'd be--

WOODMAN: Sure. Well, they had blackballed all the directors and everything during that time. You know the history of that. They blackballed a lot of the white directors and things, writers and everything. They were on that blacklist, you know. And I forget that old senator. Oh, I can't recall his name.

ISOARDI: Who, [Joseph] McCarthy?

WOODMAN: Yeah, that bastard. He caused the whole thing, boy. And if he had heard I played at that party and that I was working around, he'd fire me. [laughter] But I think he had passed then. I don't think he was living then.

ISOARDI: Were you guys ever interested in politics, then?

WOODMAN: No.

ISOARDI: Not at all?

WOODMAN: No. Didn't give it a thought. When we played for this black guy that wanted to take everybody back--what the hell's his name?--wanted to take us all back to Africa--

ISOARDI: Marcus Garvey?

WOODMAN: Marcus Garvey.

ISOARDI: You played for him?

WOODMAN: Yeah. We played for their functions and things.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? No kidding?

WOODMAN: We played for anything, man. We didn't care what it was. [laughter] But we weren't thinking about being active. Everybody wanted us to be active, but we didn't take it seriously. Because we were too young. We weren't even twenty-one, man.

ISOARDI: Was their a large Marcus Garvey organization in L.A.? Do you remember? Was it a big function or--?

WOODMAN: Well, it could have been more. We didn't care about it and getting more of the history of it. There were quite a few people.

ISOARDI: Really? Where did you play at? Was it in a hall somewhere? Or somebody's home?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, they'd get different places. I can't recall where we played. We played so many places, I can't remember.

ISOARDI: But it seems like everybody wanted you.

WOODMAN: Yeah. And, boy, I should have kept a log of all that.

ISOARDI: It would be quite a list.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Another thing, boy-- I can't think of this recording artist-- I played with a band and toured the South in '38.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. And we got stranded down in Jacksonville, Florida.

ISOARDI: Was that your first trip to the South?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Since you left Mississippi? Well, you were about nine months [old] when you left Mississippi?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: So you hadn't really experienced the South at all, then.

WOODMAN: No. That was it.

ISOARDI: So how did it strike you?

WOODMAN: Well, I didn't pay much attention, man. All we did was play. We played for white people down there, and they took all of it very well, the band and everything. So we didn't have a problem.

ISOARDI: This was '38. What kind of band was it? Was it a swing band?

WOODMAN: Yeah. It had arrangements and everything. So that made it easy for me, because I could play any arrangement, anything they put in front of me. I had an advantage, because I had been doing that when I was young. It was like when I went with Les Hite. It wasn't a problem for me. The guy took me in and gave me that music, I read it, you know. So I worked with the band till I got inducted.

ISOARDI: When did you go with Les Hite?

WOODMAN: In '41.

ISOARDI: So you go on tour in the South around '38, you said?

WOODMAN: No, that wasn't with Les Hite. No.

ISOARDI: No. That wasn't Les Hite. It was before Les Hite?

WOODMAN: Yeah, in '38. I had come back to Los Angeles.

ISOARDI: Oh, when you came back from Chicago.

WOODMAN: Yeah. I was in Seattle when Britt-- They sent for me. Les Hite.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

WOODMAN: I was in Seattle. I was with a trio. Purtel. I can't think of that Purtel's-- Guitar. We played all the coast, all the way from San Francisco, Portland, Oregon, Seattle. We were supposed to go to Vancouver [British Columbia], on up that way, but they sent for me

and sent me a ticket. So I went all the way-- That's a long ride, boy. It took about five days. No, I think it was about three or four. I don't know. That was a long ride, but it didn't bother me. I was young, you know.

ISOARDI: I'm just trying to set up sort of the sequence here. You went to Chicago in about, was it, '38?

WOODMAN: Yeah, I was there.

ISOARDI: Okay. And then you came back a year later in '39?

WOODMAN: What it was, we were stranded in Jacksonville, Florida. And this guy, Charlie Ed, had the hotel. He was a gambler. So we stayed there, and we had to work to make enough money to get back to Chicago. So we played there. We played for nothing. We ate and slept. We had a salary, but he kept it until we had enough money to go back to Chicago. But I didn't go back to Chicago. My grandmother and my father were down there visiting in Jackson, Mississippi. Since all my people were down there, my father's people, her people-- So I helped drive the car back here--he had driven down there--back to Los Angeles.

ISOARDI: And that brought you back here.

WOODMAN: So I came on back.

ISOARDI: And then you got hooked up with a band that went back through the South? Oh, no, that was before then.

And then you hooked up with a trio, and you went up the coast?

WOODMAN: Yeah. That was in '39, with Purtel.

ISOARDI: Purtel is the name?

WOODMAN: I forget Purtel's last name. He was pretty popular. He's from Texas. That's where he came from. Guitar and piano. He played bass, and he sang and things like that.

ISOARDI: You didn't have a drummer?

WOODMAN: No. Just us three.

ISOARDI: What was happening in Seattle back then? There were a few clubs?

WOODMAN: Oh, we played clubs, yeah. There were a lot of things happening. We played-- [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: Okay. So you're up in Seattle, then. And then you get a--

WOODMAN: Well, first-- Let's see. Did we play in San Francisco anywhere? Near Sacramento is where we really played. Grass Valley. We played there. Funny thing, it was down in the basement too, but it sure was a nice club. No blacks were there. They had one shoeshine guy that lived there.

ISOARDI: All white patrons.

WOODMAN: All white. All lived there in that vicinity, in Grass Valley. You didn't see any colored people. I think

they had a shoeshine guy and somebody else up there. During that time--that was in '39--there were no blacks up there at all. See, the blacks didn't start coming up that way, to Frisco, to anywhere, till the war started in the forties. That's when it got crowded. All those places we played were mostly white people. We didn't play for any colored people. We made pretty good with the trio. I don't know where I played in Seattle--at some kind of club. I don't remember nothing, man. If I remembered everything, I don't think I could put it down. [laughter] I played holes-in-the-wall and everything.

ISOARDI: Sure, sure.

WOODMAN: Hey, I was having more fun than the customers. Shit. [laughter]

ISOARDI: You were doing what you loved, weren't you?

WOODMAN: Yeah. And it was fun. And I was single. Just like a sailor. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Were you the wildest of the brothers?

WOODMAN: I think so. I was the oldest, that's why, I guess. They learned lessons from me not to be so stupid, I guess. [laughter] I messed up the band, man. I broke it up when I left. But they got another guy. Jessie Sailes-- The drummer's brother played the piano.

ISOARDI: Jessie Sailes's brother [Ashley Sailes] took over for you when you took off?

WOODMAN: Yeah. But it didn't last too long. That was kind of the end of that. They all went their separate ways, you know. Well, it wouldn't have been too long, because-- Let's see--

ISOARDI: Well, the war was coming up, so--

WOODMAN: Yeah. That would have taken care of that. It was great while it lasted, it was a great experience. And I kind of made a name. You wouldn't be out here doing this if it didn't pay at all some kind of way. I'm making history, aren't I? [laughter]

ISOARDI: Yeah, you did. You did. That's what everybody says, everybody we talk to.

WOODMAN: I never give it a thought, boy. But the others stayed with the Woodman brothers, lasted for a short while later, and after that they all went their separate ways. Well, the war really would have taken care of that, because I should have been inducted sooner than that. I got inducted in '42. I should have been inducted right when I joined Les Hite. I started getting those papers. But we moved so much, I told the people to send them back. [laughter] What did I say? I got it late or something. Finally, they caught up with us, boy.

ISOARDI: When did you get the call to join Les Hite, then? You said you were up in Seattle. And your brother-- Was it Britt?

WOODMAN: Britt was already with him.

ISOARDI: So he joined the Les Hite band.

WOODMAN: Britt was already with him. Britt had played with Lionel [Hampton] and several bands like that. Les Hite was the one he was most stable with, you know, stayed with longer than the rest. He played with Lionel for a while. And then, who is it? This guy, this other colored guy. I can't recall it. Britt probably named most of the bands he played with, didn't he?

ISOARDI: Yeah, yeah.

WOODMAN: Well, after Les Hite he played with another guy. He named them all before he went with Les Hite.

ISOARDI: So when you got the note, did Britt call you or write you a letter saying come on down and join Les Hite?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And did you want to? Were you excited about that?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, sure. Britt was trying to get me-- When he was in the service, he was in a band. But they wouldn't send us both at the same time. We couldn't be together.

So they put me in a car company in the Presidio, in San Francisco. I drove the generals and everything like that, colonels, officers. I ran a car company, drove a jeep. You see the guys that drive officers all around.

And I drove a chaplain--he was a colonel--and all the-- I joined that outfit, artillery, with the 155-millimeter [guns] all down the coast, batteries. Anyway, I drove the chaplain. This colonel, he got me transferred out of the car company. But I still did the same thing for the chaplain of my battery, when I was with one person. He could sing. He sang "Ave Maria" and all that, and he was happy. I could play anything he gave me. In other words, I was in special service. I had charge of the entertainment or anything that the soldiers needed. You know, take care of that, come down and entertain them and everything, and played for all the church services and all like this.

ISOARDI: Because you got hooked up with the chaplain?

WOODMAN: The chaplain.

ISOARDI: So when you went in there, you didn't get sent into a band.

WOODMAN: No. They wouldn't let me leave. Britt wanted me. He said I had so many places to go. But where am I going? They aren't going to let me go, man. I was an asset to them. They liked me, you know. They could use my talent. Which I don't regret, after it was all over with. You should see the write-up I got from the war department.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: And when the soldiers went to the Philippines and came over and had those things, I'd play for all those functions with a trio; guys I formed like a group with got out of the battery. We played for those things like that. So I was active all the time. Whatever I did, I was active in music.

ISOARDI: How long were you in? When did you get drafted?

WOODMAN: Three years and ten months.

ISOARDI: So you got drafted--when?--maybe around '42?

WOODMAN: Yeah, '42. That's when Britt-- We got drafted at the same time. We got our papers when we came to Los Angeles. We left from here, whatever that place down near in San Pedro is. We were down there till they took us out, whatever they did for us. Britt got a chance to join the band. But me, I stayed there, so we couldn't leave together, and they sent me near San Francisco to the Presidio. [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: Did you spend the whole war years up in San Francisco?

WOODMAN: Oh, no. That's where I was first, up there at that car company. Then I drove this colonel around. I told him, man, "Send me--" I wanted to get out of that shit, man, driving those officers and all that. I said, "Send me over to--" They were having the war over here at those islands and stuff. "Can I go over there?" I wanted

to go anywhere.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I was willing to go back down to Fort Huachuca [Arizona], where they wanted to get the whole band. I wanted them to send me down there. And they sent those guys over there, and that whole division got wiped out, man, the colored outfit. They sent them to one of those islands.

ISOARDI: No kidding. In the South Pacific?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I'd have been right where-- [laughter]

ISOARDI: Maybe it's not so bad driving that officer around.

WOODMAN: Yeah, it was something when I heard about that.

ISOARDI: So when you get your notices, you're in the Les Hite band then, right?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Well, when you come back to L.A., then, to take up with the Les Hite band, what's that like? What's the band like? Who's in the band then?

WOODMAN: Well, Les Hite was in New York when they sent for me.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? They were already--

WOODMAN: Britt was there.

ISOARDI: Oh, it wasn't in L.A. They were already traveling around the country.

WOODMAN: Yeah, they'd been moving.

ISOARDI: So you took off from Seattle to New York?

WOODMAN: Yeah, and joined the band and stayed with them until I got inducted in '42.

ISOARDI: Ah. Where were they playing in New York?

WOODMAN: Oh, we toured Philadelphia and New York and-- Everywhere. We played Newark. I can't think of all the places. The Apollo Theatre. We played all those places like that.

ISOARDI: Popular band.

WOODMAN: Yeah. All the big time, you know.

ISOARDI: Who else was in the band? Who else was playing in the band? Britt was in the band then?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I don't know if there was anybody from Los Angeles you would know. I can't even think of all those guys. I've got a picture of them over there.

ISOARDI: What was Les Hite like?

WOODMAN: He was a nice guy. He played at the Cotton Club out here in Los Angeles, out in Culver City, [Frank] Sebastian's Cotton Club. He played there for years, had floor shows and everything.

ISOARDI: So he led the band there?

WOODMAN: Yeah, until this lady, rich lady who was a widow, Miller, I think-- She owned that company. She was rich, boy.

ISOARDI: What was her name?

WOODMAN: I can't think of her name. She owned the band and we had the best of everything. We may not have been the best band, but we made more money than the rest of them.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

WOODMAN: I got $90 a week, man. That was a lot of money then.

ISOARDI: Why was she backing the band so much?

WOODMAN: She liked Les Hite. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Well, you lived well, then.

WOODMAN: Yeah. We lived good. Gerald Wiggins-- I guess you've heard of Wiggins, right?

ISOARDI: Gerry Wiggins?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Piano player. He took my place after I left.

ISOARDI: When you went into the service, he took over for you?

WOODMAN: Uh-huh.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? So the band comes back here, then, in '42 is it? And then you get drafted?

WOODMAN: No. I left that band in New York, Britt and I.

ISOARDI: Oh, you both left Les Hite?

WOODMAN: Yeah, we had our car fare, and we came home to Los Angeles and went down to [Fort] MacArthur or whatever, this camp, down here in San Pedro.

ISOARDI: So you mean the draft caught up with you back East?

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. And they gave us two weeks to go get our papers. So we came to Los Angeles. That's how it was. We came on back here, then they gave us two weeks, and then we reported down there in San Pedro. I forget. MacArthur or something down there.

ISOARDI: What was New York like? You must have had a good time?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. We stayed at-- I forget the name of that hotel right around the corner from the Apollo Theatre. That's where the hotel was. He stayed at the Teresa Hotel, the best hotel. But we stayed where most of the musicians stayed, around the corner. But it was nice. Yeah, it was a great experience. None of us were married, so it was just like being in the service, you know, like sailors or something.

ISOARDI: How long did you play with the band in New York?

WOODMAN: I only played one year. I joined them in '39, '40-- I guess '40 up to '41, something like that. They sent for me in '39. I was on the road. So when I got there, I guess it was close to '40. So I joined about '40

and stayed till '41, whenever it was, till I got inducted.

ISOARDI: I haven't asked you yet about Central Avenue. What was Central Avenue like during the thirties, before the war? Did you hang out up there much? You're certainly playing everywhere.

WOODMAN: I stayed in Watts. [laughter] That's a long way, boy, when you don't have a car or anything. You'd catch the red car. We had transportation to get to work in, but we didn't have it to go up there shopping. But most of the time we'd be up there, we'd eat at Coney Island and different places up there. We enjoyed eating that chili and stuff like that. It was great.

ISOARDI: Was Coney Island known for its chili?

WOODMAN: Yeah, that was the name: Coney Island Red Hot, something like that. [Coney Island Chili Parlor] I think the guy was Greek or something, boy.

ISOARDI: Who owned the place? Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. It was real nice. We enjoyed eating up there. But we didn't eat things like that every day, because we ate greens and cornbread out here, you know. We just ate good and healthy food. That's why-- I think it put us in shape, boy, because eating good--

ISOARDI: All three of you guys.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: You're in good shape.

WOODMAN: Yeah. We were good. We were all athletic because we'd go to the library and play on the handlebars. We liked sports and things. We'd compete to see who could chin the most. We were all strong, you know, and we all liked to fight. [laughter] I guess we were in good shape. Yeah, it was great. Young days were great.

So I didn't get married till I was twenty-nine, twenty-eight or twenty-nine. I was thirty years old when I had my first kid.

ISOARDI: So what were some of the hot spots on Central? What were the places that people would go to hang out?

WOODMAN: Well, I played for most of them. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Well, I guess you didn't have much of a chance, then, to go hear other people play, did you? Because you were always playing.

WOODMAN: That's right. And when I wasn't, I'd be home. It's kind of weird, come to think about it, but that's the way it was.

ISOARDI: Was there anything going on in Watts aside from--? You guys had your studio. Were there other places that people could go to hear music?

WOODMAN: Nothing but that Largo [Theatre]. You had two, Yeager [Theatre] and the Largo--

ISOARDI: The Yeager?

WOODMAN: On 103rd in Watts. We'd go on Saturdays to see the cowboys. We couldn't go through the week because we were in school or we were playing. So we missed out on a lot of things. The only time we got to do things was when we weren't doing anything in the daytime, and we'd go to the library. That's the only place we could read, take exercise, you know. The only place that we could use the rings and the handlebars and everything like that. That was a library, too. They had all that down at the library up there on 103rd, across the track. So that was it.

ISOARDI: So there weren't any other clubs where people could go hear music down in Watts?

WOODMAN: Well, they had the [Club] Harlem down here on 118th [Street], almost down here where I live. The Brown sisters used to have it. We used to play there, too.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? What kind of a place was that?

WOODMAN: A club. A club.

ISOARDI: A small club?

WOODMAN: Well, it was pretty large.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: The Brown sisters used to run it.

ISOARDI: Who were they?

WOODMAN: Three sisters. And it was the most popular

club. T-Bone Walker was the featured singer there.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Uh-huh. It was mostly-- He was a star there then.

ISOARDI: I'll bet.

WOODMAN: They would sing, too. They could sing, too, the Brown sisters.

ISOARDI: Were they from this area?

WOODMAN: I don't know where they were from, to tell you the truth. But they made plenty of money down there.

ISOARDI: Popular place, then.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Everybody would drive-- A lot of fun coming down here, almost down near where I live, from Central Avenue. And you had to have transportation. You couldn't catch a bus or anything, you know.

ISOARDI: I guess T-Bone Walker, even back then--he must have been pretty young--was packing them in.

WOODMAN: Yeah, he was. Sure, he was packing them in. He would have that guitar in back of his head. T-Bone played on some of the shows that we did, too, with Les Hite.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I think he played the Apollo.

ISOARDI: So he was with your band when you guys were in New York?

WOODMAN: Well, it was Stepin Fetchit, artists-- I can't

recall all of them. But they'd have side people, entertainment, you know, that would be participating on the show.

ISOARDI: So it wouldn't be just you guys playing. It would be different--

WOODMAN: Yeah, Les Hite, we played for the singers and everything, you know. I can't name all the artists and everything. I don't know what I had on my mind, but I know T-Bone Walker had played with Les. Everybody. Stepin Fetchit, him doing his crazy act. You know how he talked in a chair. Yeah, yeah, a lot of crazy talk.

ISOARDI: Was T-Bone Walker living down here, also, then?

WOODMAN: T-Bone Walker came from Texas somewhere, but he had a home down in Compton somewhere. That's down below us, but that was later on. He had his home. But I don't know where T-Bone lived, to tell you the truth.

ISOARDI: So it was the Harlem club that the Brown sisters had. Was there any other place? Or was that pretty much it?

WOODMAN: That was pretty popular. That was before we joined the union and everything. Old [Elmer] Fain from the union would come down there, from 767, that colored local, and wanted to make us join the union.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I should ask you about that. Throughout this time, then, when the band is together, you guys

aren't in the union?

WOODMAN: No.

ISOARDI: But you start getting popular, and then Fain starts noticing you?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I guess we were playing so many places. It was for the best, but we didn't think so, because we had to pay our dues.

ISOARDI: So what happened? Fain showed up one night when you guys were playing and--

WOODMAN: Yeah, he got on us. We wanted to kick his butt, though. [laughter]

ISOARDI: I heard he was a pretty tough guy.

WOODMAN: Yeah, but see, we weren't scared of him. [laughter] The only time they can actually be tough is when you're in the union. But when they're trying to get you, "Hey, man, what are you going to do? Whoop my butt?" [laughter] You know, that attitude. And that would have been fun. [laughter] Us brothers would have ruined him, man. [laughter]

ISOARDI: So did you guys join the first time he approached you?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah, we finally joined. Yeah, we joined. Buddy Collette and all of us joined at about the same time.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

WOODMAN: And then finally we got tired of that, and we

wanted to get into that white local, 47, so we finally got that straight. So we all transferred over to it. So I'm a life member from '39 to '69.

ISOARDI: So '39 is when you joined, then?

WOODMAN: Well, '39 to '69, thirty years, life member, then. You have to pay the whole dues. You pay it up. But what you do, if you work, they're going to take that interest or whatever. I forget what they call that. I haven't been in it in so long. You have to pay 2 percent of whatever you make to the union. We've got to keep it going, you know. We didn't mind that.

ISOARDI: After you joined, did you ever have any dealings with the union or anything like that?

WOODMAN: With the colored union?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. We had to pay dues and everything.

ISOARDI: Did they help you at all? Did you get any help from the union if you needed it?

WOODMAN: Well, there was nothing much they could help with, because they had their old-time musicians there. They're going to look out for them. But we didn't need much help from them.

ISOARDI: You didn't? You guys were doing it.

WOODMAN: We were all right. They needed more help than we did. [laughter]

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ISOARDI: So when you come back to California, then, I guess in '42, you get your draft notices, you spend some time with your family, then you go down to basic training down south, San Diego, was it? Or you go to Fort Huachuca [Arizona]?

WOODMAN: You mean me?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

WOODMAN: Britt [Woodman] and I went down to Fort MacArthur, right down in San Pedro. We stayed there. That was just kind of a place you shack up till they ship you out. We really didn't get any training down there. It's just some place you come in, and then they send you wherever they want to. Then you get your basic training. Britt got his where-- I forget. I know he ended up in Camp Walters down in Texas with a band. But still, I think they all have to get basic training, six weeks or whatever that is. I got mine in Frisco up there in the Presidio, in San Francisco. Then I started driving these officers after that, after basic training. And then finally I got with the artillery, Fifty-fourth Coast Artillery. That's where those 155-millimeter [guns] are, all down from San Luis Obispo on up north to Frisco, San

Jose, all around up that way. That was our job. We had batteries, A, B, C, and D, four. What I would do was go from one to the other with the chaplain, have a service, a church service. Then I'd go do special things sometimes through the week. Whatever the chaplain wanted to do, I'd be with him, because I had to drive him, you know.

ISOARDI: Pretty easy duty, though.

WOODMAN: Yeah. It was easier than when I wasn't doing it, because when I wasn't, then I had to do the pontoon bridge. That's what we did; we had to put them up, the pontoon bridge and the other kind. Those panels, oh, they were six hundred pounds, man. They put three of us on that. I had calluses on my hands for a long time, training with that. We set up timble twists. Anything that the coast artillery wanted, we had to do.

ISOARDI: You had to do it.

WOODMAN: Yeah. See, combat engineers, that's what they changed us to. They took coast artillery from us and changed us over to combat engineers. So engineers, that's what we did, build bridges. Pontoon bridges and all that. So I had to do that. When I was in the service, they sent us to Bastrop, Texas, and then they sent us overseas. I went to the Philippines. But Tangas, way out, seventy-five miles from Manila, I was stationed there for a while. Then we went to Yokohama. That's where we were supposed

to fix the-- Well, that's what we were supposed to do, invade Japan, but they dropped the atomic bomb in '45, so I didn't have to do that. We were getting ready to do that. That's where they're coming in with that combat engineer. We'd go in front of the engineers, man, and cut the barbed wire and do everything. I've been blessed, boy. Everything I was going to do was dangerous, you know.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. So they sent me from there to Tokyo. So we were stationed in Tokyo till I could come home. It was a nice experience.

ISOARDI: So you come back in '46? You're discharged?

WOODMAN: Yeah, in April or something like that.

ISOARDI: During the war years, let me ask you-- Because you don't go overseas for--what?--a couple of years, I guess, right?

WOODMAN: I went in '43.

ISOARDI: So you're in the service about a year before they send you over. Did you come back home during that time to visit when you had some leave?

WOODMAN: Not when I was overseas.

ISOARDI: When you were here, though.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: 'Forty-two or early '43.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah, I got to come home.

ISOARDI: Did the war change South Central [Los Angeles] at all?

WOODMAN: Well, they had a lot of these guys playing at different clubs in Frisco. I would be up there mostly. When I was up there, before I got shipped out-- I forget. Oh, you know, I can't think of it. Berkeley. What's that other little town from Berkeley?

ISOARDI: Oakland?

WOODMAN: Oakland, yeah. Oakland. I would mostly go over to Oakland and have more fun. I would sit in and get to play in those clubs like that.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

WOODMAN: Yeah, I jammed wherever there was any music. I always could play somewhere.

ISOARDI: Do you remember where you played in Oakland?

WOODMAN: Well, it was called-- No. Oh, I can't think of that club. You know, the funny thing, I don't remember any clubs hardly. [laughter] Even though I was part of that, I don't remember them, either. And I don't remember what I played. I just didn't have anything like that on my mind, just there, you know. Most guys can remember everything. I don't know if they've been to as many places as I have. I played every hole-in-the-wall and everything else. A lot of fun, though.

ISOARDI: What about Central Avenue during the war? Did it seem to change at all to you compared to what it was like earlier? Was it different?

WOODMAN: Well, you know, I really didn't give it a thought too much, because so many things had happened to me, man. I had been everywhere. I had been all overseas, I had been all up north, I had been everywhere.

ISOARDI: Yeah, so I guess when you look back, that period from 1938 on, you're always on the go.

WOODMAN: Yeah. And I was just in my twenties or younger, you know, just having a ball, man. If I'd have been married-- I can think of what happened after I got married better, and it wasn't too much after that. [laughter] All that stopped. Now, you asked when I came back-- I went to Alaska and this territory up there.

ISOARDI: You mean from Japan after the war?

WOODMAN: Let's see. How was that, now? I had come back. Yeah, it was after I got married in the fifties. I went to Alaska in about '53 or something like that.

ISOARDI: What brought you up there?

WOODMAN: A trio, the Jackson Trio.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Uh-huh. I played with them. My brother [William B. Woodman Jr.], he played the tenor sax.

ISOARDI: In this group?

WOODMAN: Yeah, with Bill Jackson.

ISOARDI: Now, who was in the group? Was Bill Jackson the leader?

WOODMAN: Bill Jackson was the leader. He sang, I played the piano, my brother played the tenor sax.

ISOARDI: Just you three guys?

WOODMAN: Yeah. We stayed up there for a while. That was nice. It was breaking up there, but they wanted me to stay, and I was fixing to stay and send for my wife. Well, I came on home, or something happened where--

ISOARDI: You just didn't want to stay up there?

WOODMAN: I guess not. I got to thinking about it, and it was best to come on home, you know.

ISOARDI: For the most part, though, it was a good experience playing up there?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. Well, that territory, we played-- A lot of money, man. I made good money up there. That's when they had those "bow" [silver] dollars, you know. They would throw them all up on the stage. I think some guy tried to hit me, man. [laughter] But I didn't care. [laughter] Yeah, I made good money. It was nice. But after I came home, they changed it. You know, it's a state now.

ISOARDI: Yeah. When did you come back from Japan? Was that '46?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: When you were in Japan, when you weren't doing military business, were there clubs going on over there? Places to play and things like that?

WOODMAN: They had a few places.

ISOARDI: They did? And the Japanese people were sort of receptive to the music?

WOODMAN: Well, I didn't pay too much attention to that, I was so anxious and ready to come home, man, standing by. And the guys with the most points, the married guys, they got to come home first. Even if I was older or younger or whatever, it didn't make any difference. Because they had to send the ones that had children and things. They went out first. They went by points at that time. I didn't have anybody but myself. So I finally--

ISOARDI: So you had to sit over there for a while.

WOODMAN: Yeah, just sit and wait.

ISOARDI: So when did you finally get released?

WOODMAN: I guess it was in April.

ISOARDI: It must have been '46.

WOODMAN: Yeah. I was in there three years. I went in in '42, latter part of '42. Yeah, it was '46. That's when I got married, '46.

ISOARDI: So you come back in early '46 and you find that your folks [William B. Woodman Sr. and Irene Woodman],

then, have moved. They're up in L.A.?

WOODMAN: Yeah, they were in town.

ISOARDI: And you move in with them when you first get back?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Where did you say the house was? Around Forty--

WOODMAN: Forty-ninth Street, between Main [Street] and Broadway. That's when I sent for the girl I married, Emily [Riley Woodman], from Louisiana. I was stationed down there.

ISOARDI: Where were you stationed in Louisiana?

WOODMAN: Out of Alexander.

ISOARDI: When did they send you there? It was obviously before you went to Japan, right?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. I was there first, then they sent us-- Well, we got in trouble. I was the first one that got put in jail down there.

ISOARDI: In Louisiana?

WOODMAN: [laughter] Yeah.

ISOARDI: What did you do?

WOODMAN: We had a bus driver, one of those guys that drove the bus down there-- He was talking to a white woman. I walked up to him, and he kicked me. I guess I shouldn't have interrupted. And I tried to catch him, boy. He ran. I couldn't catch that guy, man. He was a big, tall guy.

And the MP's [military police] were coming, saying they were going to hit me with those billy clubs. I told him, "You hit me, man, I'll kill you. You'd better kill me." So they didn't. What they did, they put me in jail, and my commanding officer came and got me out. And he told them, if they do anything like that again, he's going to give us some ammunition and we're going to come up there and tear up the town. So they moved us out of there.

ISOARDI: He said if they ever did anything like that to you? To you guys?

WOODMAN: To anybody in my company.

ISOARDI: No kidding? So he kind of stood up for you?

WOODMAN: Yeah, he sure did. He'd just come from overseas. He had but one arm. He'd been in combat. He was a great colonel, boy.

ISOARDI: So he wasn't going to put up with any shit from some local--

WOODMAN: No. He told them he'd tear up the town, boy. So they got rid of us. [laughter] So we went to Bastrop. That's out from Austin, Texas. That's where we went, and we left from there and went overseas. But they sent us way up back up here, up past San Francisco. I forget where they send ships when they leave from there and go overseas to Japan and there. I forget. It's up north on the other side of San Francisco. You know, I can't think

of it. It's pretty popular. You'd know it if I called it. That's where they sent--

ISOARDI: You mean San Francisco Bay?

WOODMAN: No, it's up farther than that.

ISOARDI: Farther than that?

WOODMAN: Yeah. It's right out of there, though.

ISOARDI: Really. Gee, the only port above San Francisco in California is Eureka. No, Fort Bragg.

WOODMAN: No. No.

ISOARDI: Not Fort Bragg?

WOODMAN: It was just like a deporting place where you catch the ship. I forgot. They sent us from there.

ISOARDI: It sounds like being in Louisiana wasn't that good of an experience.

WOODMAN: Not at that time, man. It was very prejudiced.

ISOARDI: Was that the only kind of incident that you had?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, I didn't stay there too long. And when we went to Bastrop, they had us way out from anywhere. It wasn't in anything. And Austin, Texas, wasn't bad.

ISOARDI: That was better. Austin?

WOODMAN: Yeah. That's the capital.

ISOARDI: And you said you met your future wife then.

WOODMAN: Down in Louisiana, yeah.

ISOARDI: How did that happen?

WOODMAN: I was playing the piano at USO [United Service Organizations], just fiddling around, that's all. I passed by her and said, "I'm going to marry you." [laughter]

ISOARDI: She said, "You are nuts"?

WOODMAN: Sure did. I found out where she lived, got a jeep, and came on by the house and met the folks. I was over there eating every Sunday.

ISOARDI: So she was a local girl.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Married to her forty-three years.

ISOARDI: Wow. So did her folks like you?

WOODMAN: Yeah. I went to church.

ISOARDI: You got along, then.

WOODMAN: Yeah. Yeah, I got along fine with everybody.

ISOARDI: So she waited for you, and you came back to California--

WOODMAN: Well, I almost started to get married before then. I was scared. I heard a guy talking about Shorty George and all that stuff, man.

ISOARDI: About what?

WOODMAN: Shorty George. He's the guy that, when you're married and you leave your wife, he takes over, man.

ISOARDI: [laughter] And he's called Shorty George?

WOODMAN: Yeah. They called him Shorty George. [laughter] So I got scared. So four years later I married my wife. I met her when she was eighteen or

nineteen. She was twenty-two when I married her. Let's see. Yeah, she was twenty-two. I think she was eighteen or something like that when I first met her. I wish I had married her then, you know. It would have put me ahead, way ahead. Because she was a good girl. She's a Christian girl and everything. But I was just scared, man. I'm still scared. [laughter] I'm real scared now, an old man like me. And everybody I like, I know it would be awful. If I had one of those young chicks, man, it would kill me. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Well, if you've got to go, there are worse ways to go. [laughter]

WOODMAN: Yeah. That would be a nice way to go, though, wouldn't it? Trying. [laughter]

ISOARDI: So Shorty George didn't show up then, while you were overseas.

WOODMAN: No.

ISOARDI: And you came back to L.A. in early '46. And then you sent for her?

WOODMAN: Yeah, I sent for her. She stayed right in my mother's house on Forty-ninth Street, and we got married in the house there.

ISOARDI: In the house there?

WOODMAN: Where my mother and father were living. I stayed there about a year, and then I went and lived over

on Ninth Avenue off of Jefferson [Boulevard]. Slim Gaillard-- Oh, yeah, he lived down the street from me. Do you remember Slim? You've heard of Slim?

ISOARDI: I've heard of him, sure.

WOODMAN: Well, see, we played at the Title House in-- Let's see. We rehearsed with Connie Jordan for about six months. That was '47. We started working at the Title House in '47 and played there till about '48. And then Title House-- I wrote it down; I found a club. We worked at Cafe Society.

ISOARDI: What was the name of that other place? Title House, you said?

WOODMAN: Title House, in Culver City. I played there. That's where Slim Gaillard and Tiny Brown played. They had the actor-- And who was this other guy? Scatman. Scatman Crothers.

ISOARDI: Scatman Crothers?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Oh, really?

WOODMAN: He was there with Slim Gaillard and then our group, Connie Jordan and the Jordanaires. That was that group. And we played at Billy Berg's all during that time in the forties, '49, '48.

ISOARDI: Well, maybe you can tell me when you hooked up with this group. When did that start?

WOODMAN: With Connie Jordan?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

WOODMAN: That was after I got out, the first group I rehearsed with.

ISOARDI: Really? How did that come about?

WOODMAN: Well, he formed this group, Connie Jordan and the Jordanaires. He had George Mason, played the bass. And Louis Gonzalez, Mexican guy, played the guitar, and Connie Jordan played-- We didn't have the bass drum, just a snare, sock cymbals. He was great. He sang.

ISOARDI: Who was he? Did he come from this area?

WOODMAN: Oh yeah. He lived over there on the west side, over on Harvard [Boulevard], a block from Western [Avenue]. We were over at his house practically every day for about six months till we built a repertoire, and then we were ready to go. We got an agent who got us the jobs and we stayed busy ever since then.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

WOODMAN: Yeah. We played Billy Berg's for intermission and everything.

ISOARDI: So when the featured attraction or whatever at Billy Berg's would take their breaks, you guys would come--

WOODMAN: Yeah, we would play. That's what we did for a long time. Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, all those

groups, we played-- We were just the house band, like. We stayed there for a while. Then we played all around Glendale, the Brass Rail and--

ISOARDI: What was the Brass Rail?

WOODMAN: It was a club in Glendale. It's just a club.

ISOARDI: Was that an all-white club?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Very prejudiced during that time. Cops harassed us all the time, boy.

ISOARDI: Up in Glendale?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Glendale has always been prejudiced.

ISOARDI: What kind of stuff did they do?

WOODMAN: Well, they wanted to look at my cigarettes to see if I had any dope in them. And I did-- The first time I found out, they say, "He's supposed to take the whole top of it off." I just had enough to take my cigarettes out, but they wanted the whole thing off. Because I guess you could hide your marijuana in there. I never gave that a thought, because I didn't have no marijuana. I smoked some, but I didn't smoke any around like that. I wouldn't dare do anything like that.

ISOARDI: Did they harass you in the clubs up there?

WOODMAN: No, just in the streets.

ISOARDI: So if they saw you in the street, they'd come up to you--

WOODMAN: Yeah, when we were getting out or something like

that. But we were used to that. We'd had a taste of that, because they finally started doing that on Central Avenue, because there were a lot of clubs on Central Avenue. But I wasn't-- Most of those clubs-- Let's see. In the forties-- Well, the only place I was playing was over on San Pedro [Street]. That's the closest place I played. I didn't play anything like Britt-- He might have played somewhere over there on Central. I don't know.

ISOARDI: He told me he played at the Downbeat [Club] once.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: With Buddy [Collette].

WOODMAN: Yeah. Well, groups like that played the Downbeat on Central, but I never played anything on Central. I was over on San Pedro. Let's see, that would be Avalon [Boulevard], Central-- That's Central right over there. Then Avalon, then San Pedro. But, see, they get closer. When you get to town, those places close in. It's a long gap from all these streets over right now, if you notice, like Broadway. They're far apart. But when you get downtown, they get closer. They come in.

ISOARDI: Yeah, right. Where were you playing on San Pedro? Do you remember the name of the club?

WOODMAN: Yeah, Cafe Society.

ISOARDI: Oh, that's where Cafe Society was.

WOODMAN: It was very popular. The Trenier Twins [Claude and Cliff Trenier] were the star there. But we were there with the club in the early part. They had things going on in the club there, then we'd come and play after hours. We didn't play in the big part upstairs. I guess they danced up there. They had another place where you could eat and a bandstand just for us.

ISOARDI: Kind of like a lounge?

WOODMAN: Lounge like. And we played there for a long time. So we made good money. We played at the Title House till twelve [o'clock], worked from eight [o'clock] till twelve at the Title House, and then we came there and played from one [o'clock] till four [o'clock].

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Uh-huh.

ISOARDI: How long did you do that, did you have that schedule?

WOODMAN: Well, for quite a while, till the police started harassing us so much that we had to close that down.

ISOARDI: When did that start? When did this harassment--?

WOODMAN: Well, so many white people were coming over that way, man, I guess they didn't appreciate it. And then, I guess, the people started messing up with dope, and things started changing. But I didn't pay attention, because I was still playing. I wasn't doing any of that. It was

happening, you know.

ISOARDI: I mean, what were the cops doing?

WOODMAN: Well, I really don't know. They had to close up one night, close the place down.

ISOARDI: The Cafe Society, you mean?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Because the cops came in and did whatever?

WOODMAN: Well, they weren't doing anything but just-- I don't know.

ISOARDI: Start harassing?

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Well, some people have told me when [William H.] Parker became chief of police then, in the late thirties, that he was some kind of white supremacist, that he didn't like people mixing down there

WOODMAN: Yeah, I know. When the [Watts] riots [happened] in '65, he was down in Georgia somewhere. He wasn't here when it happened. [laughter] He was at home, I guess. So if he's from Georgia, you know how he feels.

ISOARDI: Oh, he was a southerner? I didn't know he was.

WOODMAN: Oh, sure, sure. And most of the cops he would hire, he would get them from down there. All the cops in Watts come from down South.

ISOARDI: Really?

WOODMAN: Yeah. They knew how to handle us. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Oh, it must have been ugly.

WOODMAN: Yeah, well, you know, there was discrimination everywhere; there wasn't supposed to be, but there was in some parts of Los Angeles. You couldn't go to Compton. When I first moved down here, it was prejudiced down in Compton. That's just down the street there.

ISOARDI: Really? Compton was all white then?

WOODMAN: Yeah. We'd go over there shopping. That's where we'd buy clothes, unless we'd go downtown. So Compton would be closer. Because when you cross Rosecrans [Avenue], that's Compton, when you go east. That's where [J.C.] Penney's and kind of small department stores were, all down there.

ISOARDI: Could you go shop there?

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. They didn't care about you shopping. It's just that you couldn't live. They didn't want you living in-- Well, no conflicts, you know. The police are right there at the corner. You can't win, you know.

So I paid no attention to that. I survived all that. I'll tell you the truth, I didn't pay any attention to anything, really. When you're a musician, you get along with everybody and you understand what's going on. You have a different personality and all. We didn't take any stuff. If it would just come right directly, we'd fight anywhere. But most of the time, we knew how to handle a

situation. I could smile under any conditions, so it helped a whole lot. I didn't Uncle Tom, though. But I just couldn't take it, you know. Well, it was part of life, so it wasn't anything. That was it. Things are better now.

ISOARDI: How long did you stay at Cafe Society? How long were you guys there?

WOODMAN: Oh, several months, boy. We stayed there I imagine six months or something. They started closing in on us like they did Central Avenue. All those places started folding down, you know, closing them down gradually. See, we had so many white people come from everywhere. They liked to come; they liked to get away. They always did that, anyway, in New York. They did the same thing in Harlem. They did that-- They'd go to the Savoy [Ballroom]. All of them. They went everywhere where the black musicians played. And the white musicians would come and jam. They like that, you know, and that's the way it was.

ISOARDI: Did you ever play with any white musicians down there?

WOODMAN: Where?

ISOARDI: In any of these clubs?

WOODMAN: None that I can recall, no.

ISOARDI: How about women? Did you notice many women musicians? Did you know any?

WOODMAN: No. No. No. Come to think of it, I didn't. A few singers, but I can't recall them. Just girl singers, you know.

How are you coming along? You got enough? You got enough of nothing?

ISOARDI: Oh, we've got a lot. A lot. After Cafe Society, then, did the group stay together? Did you guys stay together and get jobs somewhere else?

WOODMAN: You mean Connie.

ISOARDI: Yeah, with Connie Jordan.

WOODMAN: No. What happened there, he got a break up in San Francisco. I think the guy was making $400 a week. It was a lot of money. He was a star doing a single. But it didn't last too long, so he finally went to Texas somewhere. He wanted me to come and play, be his piano player. And I had this house and everything. I wasn't thinking about going anywhere with him. I was working with my dad then. That was in '62 or something.

ISOARDI: You had played with Connie Jordan throughout the fifties?

WOODMAN: No.

ISOARDI: Oh, you mean he came back and wanted--

WOODMAN: Yeah, he had gone to Texas somewhere.

ISOARDI: Oh, I see, yeah.

WOODMAN: We had broken up. He broke it up. He left and

went up north to Frisco as a star. He was doing good. I don't know what happened to him. He came by here raggedy, looking bad. [laughter] He had some kind of downfall. I felt sorry for him. And he wanted me to try out again, do something. I guess he'd go get a job somewhere, and I'd be his accompanist. He'd play the drums, just us two. I said, "I don't want to do that, man." I had about two-- I don't know how many kids I had then. Shoot, I had about five kids then, man, or something. [laughter] I'm not going to leave them and go with him. [laughter]

ISOARDI: So where do you play then after Cafe Society? Where are you working then, after that?

WOODMAN: Well, let's see. How did we do that? After we left there, we split up and started working with-- I'm trying to think. Boy, that's when we played the Lighthouse, [Howard] Rumsey. The Lighthouse.

ISOARDI: Oh, you started working out at Hermosa Beach?

WOODMAN: Hermosa, yeah. Yeah. I played there at a club with Bill Jackson. He made the connection for all that. We played jam sessions down at the Lighthouse, my brother-- I think my brother. My brother played with us, William. I don't know who played bass. Boy. We just mostly had different groups, you know, just different guys. Nothing permanent. No set thing.

ISOARDI: So you're just sort of picking them up as they

come.

WOODMAN: Yeah, as they go and as they come.

ISOARDI: But you're not working anywhere else? You're relying on this for your profession, then?

WOODMAN: Yeah, just gigging. Well, that's when I started really gigging.

ISOARDI: So you're taking all sorts of things?

WOODMAN: Yeah, anything that came along. And that's why-- Now, we did that and then they came up with this [gig in] Alaska.

ISOARDI: When was that?

WOODMAN: In the fifties, right after we played the Lighthouse. You've never heard of the Lighthouse down in--?

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, of course. Howard Rumsey. Oh, sure.

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah we played down there. And we played Hermosa-- This club. You know, I can't think of that club. Boy, it was popular. We played there. It was right across the street almost from the [Lighthouse]. And, boy, this guy, we played his club, and he got-- He finally got a club-- Oh, let's see. The Jockey Club. Did I name that?

ISOARDI: No.

WOODMAN: That's where I stayed five years.

ISOARDI: And that was right by the Lighthouse?

WOODMAN: No. That's after I left the Lighthouse.

ISOARDI: So you got a job at the Jockey Club.

WOODMAN: The Jockey Club.

ISOARDI: Where was that at?

WOODMAN: Well, this guy-- They had heard me play and everything, and he asked me would I play the piano by myself, piano bar. And I'd never played a piano bar. So I took it for this same guy who had the club down in Hermosa Beach. He had this club and the Jockey Club. That's what he called it. But down in Hermosa Beach, I forget the name of it down there. It was right near the Lighthouse, where Rumsey was. You could walk from one to the other. We played there, and we had a nice crowd. We did good there and everything. Then after-- Let's see. I played at the Jockey Club, but that's about it, man. I had come back from Alaska then. I played with Duke Jones. I don't know if you ever-- This Jackson, he had him playing the bass at that time. We played some club here. That was about the last club I played. Then I start helping my dad more likely then. That was in the sixties.

ISOARDI: And then you sort of eased away from the music?

WOODMAN: Altogether. See, I went into that supply business myself. I got my own number and everything and started--

ISOARDI: Your dad was doing barber supply, right?

WOODMAN: Yeah. So what I did-- My dad, he was just about to give it up, and he wanted to sell it to me. "Will you get the equity out of your house, boy, and buy this place?" [laughter]

ISOARDI: Jeez. [laughter] A businessman to the last.

WOODMAN: Well, Dad is a businessman. He had us play-- He was giving a quarter. He's going to have me good now. [laughter]

ISOARDI: You should have told him, "I'll take it for back wages." [laughter]

WOODMAN: I didn't think of that. [laughter]

ISOARDI: "These are my back wages."

WOODMAN: But anyway, he let another guy have the place, which he didn't stay in at all. Because I had a business all sold up, but I let everybody know I was going to start working for Rockwell [International]. But I could have still-- Everybody liked me. I had a good business, but the money was coming in too slow. And the people just weren't paying me fast enough, you know.

ISOARDI: Yeah. Small business is tough.

WOODMAN: Give me $2 when I come around that week, or $4, and get $5 worth of stuff. [laughter] Standing still.

ISOARDI: You've got to run fast so you can stay where you're at.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: So then you moved into Rockwell and spent the rest of your working years there?

WOODMAN: Yeah. Eighteen years.

ISOARDI: Did you miss moving away from the music? Or were you just getting a little tired of gigging around all the time?

WOODMAN: Well, that kind of got me prepared for it ceasing, going down like it was, you know, gigging. See, I could have-- Oh, yeah, with the Jackson brothers, Eugene Jackson, the guy in the movies, the kind of-- You've seen him doing the comedy and whatnot. One of those Jackson brothers. I played with Bill Jackson. But this guy, Eugene Jackson, had a kid brother Freddy Jackson; he played the tenor. His brother [Eugene Jackson] played the drums. They could dance and everything. He was a comedian. He used to tap-dance. But you've seen him in pictures. He shines shoes, you know. He's been in a lot of pictures. Eugene Jackson. But anyway, I went out of town with him, Lake Tahoe and--what's this other place?-- Denver, Colorado, a club named Five Points there.

ISOARDI: What were you doing there?

WOODMAN: That was when my wife was pregnant with my second daughter [Brenda L. Woodman]. That was in the sixties--'59 or '60. Because I think she was born in '61

or something like that. That's why I left that job, anyway, because I didn't have any insurance when those kids were born, man. The union [American Federation of Musicians] out there, [it cost] $100 a month. It was Blue Cross. I got to work for Rockwell; it paid off. I had all kinds of teeth, eye, and everything else for my kids. So they had good attention when I started working for that company. And with my wife there, it cost me $92,000 for the hospital bill while she was there seven weeks at this hospital. Then I had those doctors, I had to pay 10 percent, about five of them, but that wasn't much, just maybe a few dollars. Well, maybe the most was $2,000 or $1,000, you know, but I can pay them like I want to. Insurance paid 90 percent. I couldn't beat that.

ISOARDI: No, you needed it.

WOODMAN: So I'm going to tell you, that was a godsend, boy, me being in that insurance. When I get sick, anything-- My prescription is $3 and I can have any doctors I want to, and they pay for it. So I'm in a good-- That's Metropolitan [Life Insurance Company]. I guess you've heard of Metropolitan. Well, that's what Rockwell had me in. So it was worth it. I paid $10 a week to be in that, so it was worth it, man. It really paid off now.

ISOARDI: Let me ask you. You mentioned, earlier on, the amalgamation of two unions [American Federation of Musicians Local] 767 and [Local] 47.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: Maybe you could talk about that a little bit. How did that get going? What did you think about that?

WOODMAN: Well, it was all right. To me it was a better location. It seemed like I was going to a building. This was a house on Central Avenue.

ISOARDI: What was, 767?

WOODMAN: Yeah. That was nothing but a big, old, raggedy house, man. It wasn't anything. Over there you had-- It's still there. It's like a union, a big building, you know. Everything. You had offices, and they had a recreation place; you could play pool in the basement and things. It seemed like you're in something. It was fine. To me, it was great.

ISOARDI: So you supported it.

WOODMAN: Sure. I had no doubts about following them there. Because there wasn't anything happening in that black union. And anyway, they got all the work, it looked like. When you get over there, you get some jobs. You get to work for those places, you know.

ISOARDI: After the war, when you're still playing during the late forties and fifties, do you get outside of L.A.

much? Do you take any gigs outside?

WOODMAN: After the war?

ISOARDI: Yeah, when you're back here and you get married and you have a house here and you settle down.

WOODMAN: Oh, no. It was just like I said it.

ISOARDI: For the most part, you were staying around here.

WOODMAN: Yeah. I stayed pretty busy for a while till the early part of the sixties. Things started slowing down. If you wanted to work, you had to go out of town. Musicians were leaving here, going to New York or somewhere. Buddy Collette stayed around here, but I think he's been away, too.

ISOARDI: So really, the late fifties, it really started slowing down a lot.

WOODMAN: Well, the end of the fifties, yeah, beginning of the sixties. Things were slow. We had a depression almost there in the sixties. There was nothing happening. Yeah. I was blessed to be able to go out there and work for Rockwell. I'd rather have been making a lot of money playing music, but I'd have had to leave here. That's what you had to do, is go somewhere else. You couldn't stay around here in Los Angeles. You had to hit the road.

ISOARDI: And you had a family pretty quickly.

WOODMAN: Yeah, yeah. And I didn't want to leave them. I had made that stretch to Alaska. I didn't want to do that

again. I could have stayed in Alaska and made good money if I had stayed there, but I had two kids. Let's see. When I was in Alaska, I had-- My wife was pregnant with the third child, which was a boy [Coney W. Woodman II]. He's forty-something. Anyway, she was pregnant with him when I was in Alaska. It was something, boy.

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ISOARDI: Well, Coney, I guess as we come to the end of this--

WOODMAN: That's about it, man. I don't think I have much to say now. You have to come back and I'll dream up something. [laughter]

ISOARDI: Well, let me just ask you a big general question. Looking back, how do you remember Central in those early days? How important was it?

WOODMAN: You know, that's something-- I never give that too much thought. How important, you said? Well, it was just something existing. It seemed great to me, whatever it was. I just enjoyed life then, man. I wasn't married or anything. I was just like a soldier, man. I'm still partying. I'm always balled, man. I've enjoyed life and just enjoyed myself. I don't want to say what I-- [laughter] I just had a lot of fun. Girls would always take to me some kind of way; I don't know why. They were a problem, I guess, but I didn't mind it too much. [laughter] It was nice.

But I settled down after I got married, and I put all my bad habits away, man, to become a father. That's why my kids are proud of me. They'd do anything for me.

Especially those daughters, man. But this boy [David B. Woodman], he's scared me to death. He's bringing me food. That's the second time this week that he's brought me food. [laughter] And I had more problems with him than any of them.

ISOARDI: Well, maybe he feels guilty now. He's paying you back for it.

WOODMAN: It could be. He's straightening up, man. He was a drag with the family and everything. He had habits-- Going to church through the week-- Well, today's Sunday, though, isn't it?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

WOODMAN: Oh, oh, that's right. It's evening. Oh. Hey, man. I was thinking this was through the week, man. [laughter] That one scared me. Going to church Saturday or Friday or something. Yeah, he isn't working today. [laughter] This is the evening service or something.

ISOARDI: Well, do you have any final thoughts? Something we might not have touched upon? Anything you'd like to say in conclusion?

WOODMAN: No. I would just say that my experience playing music was real great. I didn't accomplish all I should have and could have if some things had been another way. But as life would have it, this is the way it worked out. I don't regret it. I enjoy it and appreciate all the

experience I've had with my music. Playing with the different musicians and everything was a great experience. I'm going to tell you, it was something that I will never forget about. It was great. I really enjoyed it. I'd say I enjoyed my life. It was great. I had a great life. I have. Let's see. Twenty-six years I've been without my music, really. And Buddy Collette and all these guys are telling me to practice my piano and they want to get with me again. [laughter]

ISOARDI: That would be beautiful. Are you?

WOODMAN: Well, I'm thinking about it. I've got to do a lot of practicing, though. Oh, what I've got to practice is my technique, that's all. I can read anything; they'll never take that from me. But I've got to practice, get my fingers back in shape.

ISOARDI: Well, I think for a lot of people around L.A., if they saw the three Woodman brothers together on stage again, they would really-- That would be very nice.

WOODMAN: Oh, yeah. That's what Britt talked about, things like that. If he comes back, he doesn't know what he's going to do. I know I'm going to have to start practicing if he comes out here. [laughter] "Brother" [William B. Woodman Jr.] stays active, too. My brother can blow now, boy.

ISOARDI: He's still playing?

WOODMAN: Yeah, with the Spiritual Reeds, that organization. I don't know if he's been telling you about that group he plays with. They play for churches and different things. Britt and I went over to the rehearsals. He can still blow. I'm the only one at a standstill.

ISOARDI: Well, they're all waiting for you there, Coney.

WOODMAN: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Well, Coney, thanks very much for participating, for sharing your thoughts.

WOODMAN: Well, I'm glad that you got this out of me. I didn't know what I was going to say. I forgot everything, boy.

ISOARDI: I don't think you have. You can't say that anymore. [laughter]

WOODMAN: You made me think, man. I don't use my brain like that. [laughter] I'm saving it for that music.

ISOARDI: I really hope we get a chance to hear you. Thanks again, Coney.

WOODMAN: Yeah, okay.

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